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# **THE ROMA IN TURKEY FROM SURVIVAL MECHANISMS TO DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES**

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## Abstract

*“Allaha şükürler olsun. Beterin beteri var”<sup>1</sup>*  
*[Praised be God. It could be worse than that]*

This dissertation examines the extent in which state policies have affected the Roma in Turkey by looking into the reasons for their poverty and social exclusion as well as into the survival mechanisms and livelihoods strategies they have employed as a response. The study addresses the situation of the Roma from the perspective of the approach the Turkish state has had on ethnicities, the accession conditionalities imposed by the European Union and the neo-liberal policies implemented by the government after 2002. Broadly, the study illustrates the impact of long-lasting structural invisibilization towards the Roma as well as the manner in which the Roma have positioned themselves and negotiated with power in order to survive. Having in mind that the first official measure of the 2010 Roma Opening initiative of the AKP Government was the provision of housing, the dissertation focuses particularly on the housing policies that have had an impact on the livelihoods strategies of the Roma in Turkey: the “housing for the Roma” [Tr. *Roman konutları*] initiative and the urban regeneration [Tr. *kentsel dönüşüm*] projects run by the state authorities all over Turkey. The research shows that, while the Roma have been long affected by the invisibilisation and exclusion of the state policies, the provision of housing alone, without accompanying measures and without taking into account the needs and specificity of the communities targeted, does not have the potential to get the Roma out of poverty nor to tackle their exclusion. Moreover, the demolition of the *gecekondu* settlements and its consequential displacement sets poor Roma on a more vulnerable path from which they have difficulty to recover and to find sustainable livelihoods strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> 60 year old Roma man in Istanbul displaced due to urban regeneration

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## Acronyms

<b>AKP</b>	[Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi] Justice and Development Party
<b>CHP</b>	[Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi] Republican People Party
<b>CoE</b>	Council of Europe
<b>CPRC</b>	Chronic Poverty Research Centre
<b>DW</b>	Deutsche Welle
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>ECRI</b>	European Commission Against Racism
<b>ECSR</b>	European Charter for Social Rights
<b>EDROM</b>	Edirne Roma Association
<b>EEC</b>	European Economic Community
<b>EECARO</b>	Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office
<b>EP</b>	European Parliament
<b>ERGO</b>	European Roma Grassroots Organisation
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>ERTF</b>	European Roma and Travellers Forum
<b>HE</b>	[Halk Evi] Community House
<b>HRW</b>	Human Rights Watch
<b>ID</b>	Identification Document
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organization
<b>IPA</b>	Instrument for Pre-Accession
<b>iRSN</b>	Istanbul Romani Studies Network
<b>IRU</b>	International Roma Union
<b>ISMEP</b>	Istanbul Seismic Mitigation and Emergency Preparedness Project
<b>İŞKUR</b>	[Türkiye İş Kurumu] Turkish Employment Agency
<b>JICA</b>	Japan International Cooperation Agency
<b>MGD</b>	Millennium Development Goal
<b>MG-S-ROM</b>	Committee of Experts on Roma and Travellers (MG-S-ROM)
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>ODIHR</b>	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>OSF</b>	Open Society Foundation
<b>OSI</b>	Open Society Institute
<b>RNC</b>	Roma National Congress
<b>STK</b>	[Sivil Toplum Kuruluşu] Civil Society Organization
<b>TAIEX</b>	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange
<b>TC</b>	[Türkiye Cumhuriyeti] Turkish Republic
<b>TL</b>	Turkish Lira
<b>TOBB</b>	[Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği] Turkish Union of Chambers and Stock Exchange
<b>TOKİ</b>	Housing Development Administration
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Fund
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UN-HABITAT</b>	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>WJC</b>	World Jewish Council
<b>ZDA</b>	Zero Discrimination Association

### ***Elmas' View: The Experience of Being a Roma – Reminiscence and Reflection***

Elmas Arus comes from a mixed and controversial background. She is Alevi Muslim, with an Abdal father and a Roma mother. Her family moved from one place to another due to discrimination and poverty, from Northern Turkey's Amasya to the metropolis of Istanbul, in search for better means of survival. As a child, she had to contribute to the economy of the household by collecting paper and metal scrap from dumpsters around the city. She struggled to be allowed by her family to continue her education and resisted early marriage. Elmas was the only one that managed to escape her family's destiny. With help from some good people, she managed to continue her education and to move out of the Roma neighbourhood. Nowadays, she is one of the most known Roma leaders in Turkey, president of the Zero Discrimination Association and head of a network of NGOs of Roma, Dom, Lom and Abdal in Turkey. She is also the author of a documentary on Roma in Turkey called "Buçuk" – The Half<sup>2</sup>. These are her reflections about her experiences of living in the urban areas of Turkey:

*Our people were basket makers and, because of this craft, they managed to interact with the society. We were still marginalized back in Amasya, but that did not obstruct us from getting an education or to find work. When we came to Istanbul, however, we got to know both poverty and exclusion at the same time. We did all the unwanted jobs of the city: we collected stuff from garbage because we could not find anything else to do. That kept us alive, but also kept us poor and away from the rest of the society. Apart from collecting their waste, the society did not need us. When we were making and selling our baskets – we were needed. People had to buy those from us. We were the providers. But in the big city we had nothing to offer.*

*There was this big difference between us and the people of the city. We were far from the rest of the society, and just imagined things about each other. The city had no connection with us – it did not "talk" to us.*

*Being a Gypsy meant being stuck in a closed "road" that led nowhere good.*

*Our barracks were demolished many times and collecting from garbage got my father's pride shattered. In the end, he took refuge around his shack. He improvised a small garden around it, planted trees and raised some chicken – just like in his old home in Amasya. He stopped seeing his relatives. He stopped going to the city. The city seemed too big for him.*

*It is imperative to have a helping hand in order to get out of poverty. When you are poor and have to struggle to make ends meet day by day, you cannot escape that place. It is impossible to break out of poverty.*

*[Regardless of your achievements]... You can still be demoted to a second class; you need to show humbleness and gratitude for the fact that society has accepted you and has given you recognition for your qualities and efforts.*

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<sup>2</sup> In Turkey, there is a saying referring to the Roma among other people / races of the world as "yetmiş iki buçuk millet" [72 and a half peoples] hinting at the 72 million population of Turkey and at the fact that the Roma are a "half" / "unequal" / "uncomplete" / "not a people".

# **THE ROMA IN TURKEY - FROM SURVIVAL MECHANISMS TO DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Background and Context**

#### ***1.1.1. Orientation of the Research***

In this research I look into the situation of the Roma in Turkey, the reasons behind their poverty and social exclusion and the coping mechanisms and livelihoods strategies they have employed as a response.

This study was motivated by my desire to find out the extent to which state policies have affected the status of the Roma in the context of Turkey's specific approach towards ethnicities, the European Union accession conditionalities and the neo-liberal policies that were introduced in Turkey after the 2002 change in government. In this regard, the study intends to look into the reasons behind and the impact of the policy switch of 2010, which recognized the discrimination and precariousness that the Roma have been facing in Turkey and granted them specific policy provisions through the Governmental Roma Opening initiative.

Taking into account the fact that the first issue addressed by the policies generated under the Roma Opening was the poor housing conditions of the Roma, my research focuses on the housing policies that have an impact on the situation of Roma communities and the livelihoods strategies the Roma employ as a result. In order to inform the questions of the research, I conducted two case studies that illustrate the particular impact that the housing policies have on the poverty and social exclusion of the Roma in Turkey.

Since 2005, when the pre-accession negotiations started, Turkey has been on a more consistent track of aligning its internal policies with the EU requirements. Having this in mind, my research positions the analysis on the status of Roma in Turkey into the broader context of the European Roma contemporary social inclusion policies that apply also to Turkey. Moreover, the study draws from the path of different Roma communities across Europe, the national and European experiences and policy approaches to poverty and social exclusion, by highlighting the variety and specificities of the groups that are gathered under the Roma ethnonym.



#### *1.1.1.1. The Focus of the Case Studies*

The case studies of this thesis focus on the housing provisions that have affected to a great extent the poorest Roma living in urban areas in Turkey. They take into account the policies related to the Governmental Roma Opening, the housing for the poor, as well as the general “urban regeneration” projects carried out across Turkey.

The field research was conducted in two different locations in Turkey. One site is situated in the city of Samsun, in the Northern part of Turkey, where the municipality has demolished an old neighbourhood (known as “200 Houses”) in 2008 and has provided new homes for 264 families, in the form of a “model housing scheme” of apartment blocks in another part of the town. The other site of the case study is Küçükbakkalköy district of metropolis Istanbul, where the Roma have been displaced by an urban regeneration / renewal project run by the municipality since 2006 and have spread to different locations in the city. The interviews conducted during the fieldwork in these sites explored the livelihoods strategies of the Roma before and after displacement: back in the old neighbourhoods, in the new allocated apartments or in the temporary or improvised shelter they had to opt for, in the absence of other solutions. The study engages with the collected data to illustrate the manner in which the Roma position themselves and how they negotiate with power.

Around 80% of the Roma in Turkey live in urban areas and usually in poor neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods have been to a great extent centrally located in the urban settings, and as a result, included in municipal plans for urban regeneration / renewal / transformation. Urban agglomerations in Turkey are the target of continuous gentrification and, due to the high demand for housing, new high-rise apartment block schemes or gated villa compounds are built in place of demolished old neighbourhoods or at the outskirts of the cities.

The precarious situation of the Roma and particularly their poor housing conditions were officially acknowledged for the first time through the governmental Roma Opening launched in 2010 (Hürriyet 2010). Poor urban Roma generally obtain their livelihoods by performing daily jobs, like scrap collection, recycling, cleaning, street commerce etc. The location of their homes in modest neighbourhoods with low-maintenance requirements, but close to the main economical centres of the cities, represents a prerequisite for their survival. However, the authorities are

declaring these neighbourhoods “risky” due to their alleged high degree of human and environmental vulnerability.

The development plans of Turkey include the “Urban Transformation Project” [Tr. *Kentsel Dönüşüm Projesi*], which targets poor and at-risk neighbourhoods, like the ones most of the Roma live in. The web page of the Directorate General of Infrastructure and Urban Transformation Services of the Ministry of Environment and Urbanisation (2015) reads that their vision is to create “redeemed disaster risk, healthier, and safer areas” in Turkey. The responsibility for urban renewal / transformation is given to municipalities and TOKI - the Turkish Housing Development Administration, who present a limited set of choices to the householders while proceeding with the demolition and renewal plans. The practice is that owners are encouraged to sell and move away, as they would not be able to afford the costs of the reconstructed apartments / houses, while renters have no choice but to look for other options elsewhere. In other cases, owners are given in exchange newly built apartments at the periphery of the city, for which they have to pay mortgages they usually cannot afford. A Council of Europe (CoE) mission in 2008 concluded that the evictions going on in Istanbul were “systematic, not sporadic, and often aim to move away the Roma from town centres into isolation” (CoE 2008). The end result is that the displaced have become more vulnerable than before; even those who owned houses before and were provided with alternative apartments. In the same line, Amnesty International indicates that “people facing forced eviction are not just at risk of losing their homes, but losing their livelihoods and being forced further into poverty” (Christie-Miller & Lewis 2011). From this perspective, it can be argued that the Roma living in neighbourhoods subjected to urban regeneration are among the most affected and have become the most vulnerable, being left with limited options to restore their livelihoods (EC 2010a:33-34).

By 2014, housing was the only official policy targeting specifically for the Roma in Turkey, the Roma being the only (ethnic) group targeted expressly in the general housing plans of Turkey, through the 2010 Roma Opening. Responsibility for implementation of the housing provision policy was handed to TOKI who was expected to deliver proper accommodation for the Roma in need. However, no clear timeline, clear indicators or transparent planning and monitoring allowed for this provision to be properly followed up. TOKI has become for many Roma who have

been influenced by its policies and projects, an institution that has rendered them more vulnerable than before<sup>3</sup>.

The housing provision for the Roma has always been a challenging matter for many European countries and in spite of thorough guidelines designed by national and international bodies, the models implemented generally ghettoized the Roma who hardly manage to bridge their lifestyle or livelihoods.

### ***1.1.2. Perspectives on Approaching the Roma***

The Roma are considered to be the largest minority population in Europe, estimated by the CoE between 10 and 12 million people<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, although without scientific basis, CoE also estimates that almost 4% of Europe's Roma live in Turkey (CoE 2012c).

Although the estimates in terms of population are varying and they cannot be validated officially, since ethnic data cannot legally be collected in Turkey, different scholars consider that there are between 2 to 5 million Roma living in Turkey. Most of these claims are based on the figures given by different leaders and civil society organisations (Karimova & Devereil 2001:14). According to these estimates, Turkey appears to have the largest Roma population among all countries in Europe. Even in the countries where censuses do target ethnicity, the Roma are presented as being undercounted. Alternative higher estimates are provided by community leaders, civil society organisations or other experts in the field. The most vehiculated reason for the lower estimates is that Roma tend not to recognize their ethnic identity in censuses that allow for such collection of data, due to stigma and discrimination. This situation brings into perspective the issue of identity and self-determination. On this matter, Surdu & Kovacs have highlighted the fact that such parallel estimates are done out of a "racialised conception" according to which "what counts as Roma is

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<sup>3</sup> This negative "fame" of TOKI has already entered into the local folklore, acknowledged to be an "inevitable faith" of the poor who have to leave their old neighbourhoods and homes, giving up the lifestyle and the community they were part of to live in high-rise apartment blocks away from the city centre. The *Sulukule Roman Orchestra* (Sulukule being one of the most famous Roma neighbourhoods demolished in Istanbul due to the urban regeneration project) put the displeasure of Roma into song: "Rak, rak, raki... You burned us, TOKI... You ripped me out of my neighbourhood, unscrupulous TOKI" [Tr. *Rak, rak, raki... Yaktın bizi TOKI... Mahallemden kopardın, vicdansız TOKI*].

<sup>4</sup> Surdu & Kovacs rightly highlight that these widely used estimates are "political rather than scientific", having in mind that they are based on a mixture of different sources and not necessarily on verified scientific research (2015:9).

not self-ascription or objective characteristic, but public perception and expert assertions that unify the Roma through a belief in common kinship” (2015:9).

Since the term “Gypsy” remains a contested designation, the generic ethnonym “Roma” is used in this study to cover the groups allegedly having the same origins and similar lifestyle. In Turkey, these groups are the Roma [Tr. *Romanlar*] (also identified as “European Roma”), the Dom [Tr. *Domlar*] (“Middle Eastern Roma”), and the Lom [Tr. *Lomlar*] (“Caucasian Roma”). After 2010, some Roma NGOs<sup>5</sup> and the Turkish Government started to use the designation “Roma and Roma-like groups” which covers the Roma, the Dom, the Lom and the Abdal<sup>6</sup> (“Roma and groups with a similar life-style” [Tr. *Roman ve Romanlar gibi yaşayan gruplar*]) in policy documents aiming at improving their vulnerable situation. This otherwise inclusive appellation has been however contested by a number of Roma leaders under different reasoning, among which the concern that the expected European funds (dedicated to the social inclusion of the Roma in the candidate countries) would be insufficient for “the real Roma” since these funds have to be split with “the others”.

In this study, I use the umbrella term “Roma” to refer to the Roma, the Dom, the Lom and the other similar groups like the Abdal, who face the same issues, are hetero-identified as “Gypsies” [Tr. *Çingene*] and are targeted by the same policies in Turkey. At the level of inter-governmental institutions, the CoE uses the terms “Roma and Travellers”, for instance, “to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by its work in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti / Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash / Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as

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<sup>5</sup> The Roma Civil Society – Public Administration Dialogue Group coordinated by Zero Discrimination Association (with Roma, Dom, Lom and Abdal NGOs members) advocated for the designation “*Roman ve Romanlar gibi yaşayan gruplar*”.

<sup>6</sup> The Abdal in Turkey are a socio-cultural group of Alevi faith which used to have a nomad lifestyle and generally perform traditional jobs similar to those of the Roma: musicians, magicians, thinsmiths, jewelers, basket and sieve makers etc. They live in rather closed communities and are generally identified by the rest of the society as “Gypsies”. Although their mother tongue (Abdotili or Teberce) has not been properly researched up to now, their vocabulary includes words from Persian, Romani, Kurdish and Turkish. According to their community leaders but also according to some historians and ethnographers who worked on minorities in Turkey, they are a Turkmen tribe with origins from Khorasan Province of Iran (Andrews 1992). In his book *God's unruly friends: Dervish groups in the Islamic later middle period, 1200-1550* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), Ahmet T. Karamustafa mentions among the Qalandars, the Haydaris, the Janis, the Shams-i Tabrizis and the Bektashis, a group called the “Abdal of Rum”. According to Karamustafa, the Abdals were known for their antisocial and antinomian behaviour. Also on p.13 the author argues that they believed in “renunciation of society through outrageous social deviance”.

Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term ‘Gens du voyage’, as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies”<sup>7</sup>.

The Roma, the Dom and the Lom in Turkey had less social interaction with each other and no joint civic engagement before the Roma issue emerged in the public eye through the governmental Roma policy announcement of 2010. The active entities representing them (NGOs and activists) were formed mostly after 2002, when public discussions and academic debates started on the Roma issues. These groups live in different areas of the country and present religious and linguistic particularities. Until they were referred to as such by scholars and foreign activists, they did not consider themselves as being part of the same group, with the same assumed origins. The Roma are mainly Sunni Muslims of Hanefi<sup>8</sup> rite or recently adepts of different Islamic sects like Nakshibendi (cases found in Istanbul), Ismaili (Istanbul), Melani (in Manisa), and Şih Menzir (Adiyaman)<sup>9</sup>. They speak Turkish and some Romani dialects. A very few Roma have converted to Christianity, attending the congregations of (rather underground) Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Roma live mainly in Thrace and Marmara region. The Dom are Sunni Muslims of Shafi rite (Mardin, Bitlis, Bingöl) or Hanefi rite (Diyarbakır, Hatay), speaking predominantly Domari and Kurdish and living mostly in South Eastern Turkey. The Lom are mainly Sunni Muslims of Hanefi rite but some are also Alevi speaking Turkish and limited amount of Lomca / Lomavren and live mostly in the Northern part of Turkey. The Abdal (group with similar lifestyle and hetero-identified also as “Gypsy”) are Alevi, speaking Kurdish, Teberce and Turkish, all in rather precarious proficiency.

Wherever they live, the Roma are generally subject to discrimination and social exclusion, continuing to live in sub-standard conditions that have been a constant challenge both for their own livelihood strategies as well as for the policy orientation of the countries they inhabit. After the collapse of the communist regimes

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<sup>7</sup> CoE website: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/roma>, 2017

<sup>8</sup> It is claimed that up until the 1960s, some of the Roma in the Anatolian region used to be Alevi-Bektasi. These are the groups that came from Greece or from Bulgaria. (Arus, 2016, “Buçuk” documentary research)

<sup>9</sup> Şih Menzir is an Islamic sect created around a religious figure with the same name. The Şih (Sheikh) and his adepts have established a scheme of rehabilitation of drug addicts in a village of Adiyaman Province. Roma drug users are gathered by an NGO and enrolled in rehab for around 15 days upon which they can go back home. Once back, Roma civil society sources claim that these individuals “change their families” meaning that they convert and adopt the same conservative dress code of the sect and follow its rituals. Moreover, some Roma NGO sources claim that the rehabilitation is done not only by the religious figures through spiritual rituals but also by former Narcotics Security Forces officers who are employed in the amenities.

in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, the Roma started to be officially recognized as an ethnic minority or group with specific rights stipulated under relevant national and international legislation. Baar argued that, since the early 1990s, the Roma have become “the explicit target” of a unique “process of Europeanization”, a process which did not apply in the same manner to any ethnic group or minority in Europe (2011:157). Referring to the efforts and calls of the EU towards addressing the situation of the Roma, Vermeersch argued that the EU has “joined a complex political game of framing and reframing the Roma” (2012:2), adding up to the “new understandings of who the Roma are, what they need, and how they should be helped” (Ibid).

Similarly, different scholars argue that the Roma were not considered an ethnic group in Europe until their status started to be politicised by institutions, activists and academia. The late Nicolae Gheorghe (1997, 2013), suggested that during the medieval period, the term “Gypsy” designated a social status and not an ethnic one. The Romanian historic Venera Achim (2005) showed that the statistic data of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century categorized “the Gypsies” only as a fiscal and social category<sup>10</sup>. On this issue, Surdu & Kovacs further emphasized that, in twenty years, “the Roma label has become institutionalised across Europe and is replacing a wide variety of identities that were applied for centuries to diverse groups” (2015:6), “the driving force behind this process” being “competitive political interest” (2015:7).

The candidate states for EU accession have been required by the European Commission (EC) to address the situation of their most vulnerable populations, and particularly of the Roma. The governments of candidate states have been demanded to design policies and strategic plans for Roma inclusion and progress on this has been recorded in Annual Country Progress Reports by the EC.

Turkey has been a candidate for European integration since 1959<sup>11</sup> and this process has been “traditionally presented by the political centre in Turkey” as an

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<sup>10</sup> The first census in Romania which recorded the Roma (“Gypsy”) as an ethnicity was done in 1930.

<sup>11</sup> Turkey’s relationship with the EU has been challenging since its first 1959 application for EEC/EU membership. The country suspended its relations with the EU in several occasions. Similarly, the EU ruled against Turkey on the account that “its transition to democracy...was far behind from European standards” (Vardar 2005:92). In 1999, the EU Helsinki Council recognised Turkey as equal candidate and, in 2002, the Copenhagen European Council decided on the negotiations phase, with the condition that “Turkey fulfils the Copenhagen political criteria” (Littoz & Villanueva 2004). In 2005, the pre-accession process started with 35 negotiation chapters. In 2012, only 13 chapters were open and a single one achieved its aim and has been closed (EC 2012). Since 2013, three other Chapters have been opened for negotiation, alongside the visa liberalisation dialogue. See EU – Turkey timeline: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/turkey/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/turkey/index_en.htm)

association with a “richer and better world” (Vardar 2005:93). In the case of Turkey, a strategy for the Roma was expected since the official recognition of the issue in 2010. Between 2013 and 2015, different ministries were designated and took turns in working on the strategy, in consultation with Roma civil society. The strategy approaches the Roma as a vulnerable group and it is the only strategic document addressing the vulnerability of a particular ethnic group in Turkey. A draft of the strategy was circulated for feedback to different stakeholders in 2014, but at the time of finishing my field research had yet not been adopted. As a consequence of the repeated delays by the Turkish Government, in 2014, the EC included the requirement of a Strategy for the Roma in the “visa liberalisation” negotiation package with Turkey. As a result, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2016, the Government, through the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, adopted the first Roma Strategy<sup>12</sup> (as a short version, with a first Action Plan for 2016-2018 to be developed).

While having a different historical path than the Roma in Europe, at least after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire (1922) and the foundation of the modern Turkish Republic (29 October 1923), the various groups in Turkey (Roma, Dom, Lom, and other similar groups like the Abdal) belong to the majority Muslim population of the country. For this reason, no consistent state policy targeted their situation in particular until the EU started to pressure Turkey to address the issue punctually.

The most visible Roma in Turkey – the poor Roma - exploit niches of the informal economy, performing odd, unregulated jobs, street commerce or daily labour, uncovered by social security and with no sustainable prospects of decent living. Every aspect of their life is mutually reinforcing, social determinants of their status being interconnected, as will be illustrated further. Mainly due to poverty and discrimination (not only on ethnic grounds but also on social grounds), the education level of the Roma communities is consistently low and little seems to have changed from one generation to another in terms of educational attainment. For instance, although the Turkish health care system has been functioning well and with a lot of provisions for the most vulnerable populations since 2002, access remains limited for the Roma due to low educational and health literacy. However, the most pressing issue of the Roma in Turkey, after AKP came to power, is that of displacement due

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<sup>12</sup> Published in the Official Gazette on the 27.04.2016

to urban regeneration. As a result of demolition of neighbourhoods, evictions or resettlement, livelihoods and household safety nets of Roma families' lives are disrupted. Displacement leads also to loss of validity of personal identification papers, which are issued based on proof of residence. This issue, as temporary as it might be for some, has repercussions also on their ability to access social welfare services for adults and continuing education for children due to the fact that they cannot be enrolled in schools if they do not make proof of residential address.

In its Annual Progress Reports, the EC has been criticizing the Turkish Government regarding the situation of the Roma and repeatedly requested provision of remedies. After the 2002 change of Government, a number of sensitive issues relating to the status and situation of ethnic groups like the Kurds but also the Roma started to be tackled and Turkey registered brief progress on the alignment with the EU criteria. Legal changes that addressed the right of assembly and rules for the functioning of civil society organisations also had a positive outcome regarding the influx of Roma non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and increased visibility on the issues they faced.

In 2010, the Turkish Government has officially recognized the issues faced by the Roma, by launching an initiative called the Roma Opening [Tr. *Roman Açılımı*], which targeted the improvement of the Roma situation. This initiative was one of the few attempts of the AKP Government to target specific ethnic or religious groups, while the laws of the Turkish Republic continued to put emphasis on the homogeneity of the Turkish Muslim majority. The Roma Opening came after a controversial 2009 Kurdish Opening (Aktan 2013), which experienced a period of deceptive ups and downs since it was hoped to lead to a peaceful solution to the armed conflict in South Eastern Turkey, and an Alevi<sup>13</sup> Opening (PMO 2010), which was debated between 2009 and 2010 in a series of workshops also as part of a “democratization package” announced by the AKP Government. Besides putting focus on ethnicity (Kurdish) and the differentiations within the Muslim faith (Alevi) of highly discriminated groups, these “Openings” were launched without meaningful

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<sup>13</sup> The Alevis are a minority Muslim community in Turkey, unrecognized officially by the state and which has been experiencing prejudice and discrimination in a Sunni Muslim-dominated society. A large number of Shia communities with different beliefs and ritual practices call themselves Alevi. The Arabic speaking Alevi communities of Southern Turkey are the extension of Syria's Alawi (Nusayri) community and have no historical ties with the other Alevi groups. The important Alevi groups are the Turkish and Kurdish speakers (the latter still to be divided into speakers of Kurmandji and of related Zazaki). The term “Alevi” encompass several disparate groups, like the Turkomans, the Yoruk and the Tahtaci (Karimova & Deverell 2001:8).



preparation, having in mind the highly sensitive issues they represent in the Turkish society, and did not entirely succeed.

The rule considering all Turkish Muslims of any ethnicity as being part of the majority population (the non-Muslim were considered minority: Jewish, Armenian and Greek communities) was initiated in the Lausanne Peace Treaty<sup>14</sup> of July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1923 which entered into force on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1924. The Lausanne Treaty was argued to have “projected for all Muslim citizens of Turkey a Turkish national identity” (Krivisto 1988). The secular de-ethnicized model of “Turkishness” was constructed around a “civic, territorially defined identity” hence representing “all those within the Turkish state” (Secor 2004:355). Article 66 / Paragraph 1 of the 1982 Turkish Constitution stipulates that “everyone bound to the Turkish state through the bond of citizenship is a Turk” (TC 2001). In this regard, the Lausanne Treaty seems to have been a consolidation of the Turkish Republic’s rule, based on the superiority of Turkishness, secular politics and patriotism that has its roots in the Ottoman period<sup>15</sup> and the Young Turks government of 1908-1918<sup>16</sup>.

The Ottoman archives show that the Roma (identified under different names e.g.: *Kıpti*) were mostly nomadic and Christian during the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, but became predominantly Muslim and sedentary by the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Marushiakova & Popov 2001:57). These groups were differentiated in the tax registers and recorded separately with references to their nomadic or settled status. After the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, many Muslim Roma families came to Turkey from

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<sup>14</sup> Peace Treaty signed between Turkey and the British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania and the Serbo-Croatian-Slovene State. The Treaty mentions the rights that non-Muslim minorities (Jews, Armenians and Greeks) would enjoy. Articles 37 to 45 stipulate basic principles for the protection of minorities, which include “the right to use their own language, run their own schools, and maintain their social and religious institutions” (Treaty 1924).

<sup>15</sup> The regulation of minority groups of the Republic according to confessional lines emerged from the structure of the Ottoman Empire and its *millet* system, as its majority citizens were identifying “with the transnational Islamic community [*umma*]” (Secor 2004:355). Organized on the basis of Islamic principles, the Ottoman Empire approached its citizens as communities and not as individuals. The *millets* were communities of faith organised autonomously according to religion, culture, economic and social life; every *millet* was led by its highest leaders called *millet başı* [head of *millet*]. The millet system attempted to keep different communities “apart, but in harmonious coexistence, thus reducing to minimum the possibility of conflict, and preserving social order in a heterogeneous state”. Even if internally managed, these communities were imposed residential limitations or dress codes, mobility across communities being less tolerated. The link between these different communities, Muslim and non-Muslim, was the variety of artisan guilds, which “cut across *millet* boundaries” and enabled individuals from different groups to work together, practicing the same jobs, embracing “common economic activities and social needs” (Sonyel 1993:5).

<sup>16</sup> “Young Turks” [Tr. *Jön Türkler*] was a reformist movement that helped the replacement of the Ottoman Empire’s absolute “monarchy” with a constitutional government, which led to the instalment of a of multi-party democracy in the country.

Greece, along with other Muslim groups, during the official population exchanges. This was an official process, called *mübadele* [exchange], stipulated under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. According to the Treaty, the Greek Orthodox citizens in the newly established Turkish Republic had to “return” to Greece, while the Turkish Muslims (including the Roma) in Greece had to come to Turkey (see section 3.2.2 for details on *mübadele*).

Later on, for the express purposes of controlling certain populations’ movement, some discriminatory regulations and laws referring also to the Roma were issued and kept in force until 2006. As explained further in the Section “Inclusive Citizenship – Excluding Regulations in Turkey” of this study, a relevant example for the manner in which Roma have been approached in Turkey is the Settlement Law [Tr. *İskan Kanunu*] issued in 1934, which addressed “the nomads and itinerant Gypsies” who “are not to be settled in the country” alongside “those that are not linked to the Turkish culture”, “the anarchists” and “the spies”. In the same manner were presented also the “Ordinance on the Discipline Rules of the Police” and the official binding document referring to “Activities to be Developed in the Police Offices” (1964) which vilified the poor and the Roma by mentioning the “Gypsies who have no specific job” and those that “do not want to work” (TC 2012).

The tone of these official documents directly influenced the treatment Roma received from the state and the perception society had of them. Consequently, “the social perception of Roma” shaped “their self-perception” (Akkan et al. 2011: 48). Even though officially part of the Muslim majority population of the country and formally recognised as citizens with equal rights, many Roma stated during my research that they felt numerous times treated as “second class” citizens and some of them seemed to have surrendered to this condition. This situation compares to what Sigona & Monasta (2006) have described as “imperfect citizenship” when referring to the Roma communities in Italy: “the boundaries of citizenship, as well as the entitlements, rights and duties attached to it are always fluid and subject to negotiation”, giving the Roma “a sense of uncertainty of their rights and entitlements and, importantly, affecting also their perception of what discrimination is” (cited in Sigona & Trehan 2011:3).

The most visible Roma, those who did not hide their ethnic particularities, or did not manage to escape the poverty trap, have been facing multidimensional forms of exclusion and growing insecurity. Alongside social stigma, financial insecurity

and disempowerment through poverty, a vicious circle has been created around them, in which the greater their inequality, the less their capacity to participate in the development of the society, and inversely the less participation they have, the greater their inequality. Moreover, the fact that they tend to live mostly in stigmatized spaces and perform “unwanted” jobs has contributed also to the Roma’s “long-lasting social exclusion and fragile citizenship” (Akkan et al. 2011:28). When people are poor and excluded it becomes harder for them to exercise active citizenship. Moreover, some scholars argue that even if disadvantaged groups participate in society and are represented in political processes, that does not “automatically translate, for instance, into greater equality” when using public resources (Ferguson 2008:4). Nevertheless, there are examples from the development world but also from the Roma communities in South East Europe that illustrate the fact that the mobilization of local disadvantaged communities and the facilitation of cooperation with local authorities can lead to a certain improvement in their status and living conditions<sup>17</sup>. Nevertheless, evidence shows that meaningful participation is more likely to happen “when real resources and power are involved” since “empowerment, influence, and agency entail more than being invited to the table” (Silver 2007:16).

All over Europe, the social positioning and economic status of the Roma has shaped their access to social resources and services (Madanipour 2003). Some scholars speak about a sort of “*Romanization* of poverty and social exclusion” (Akkan et al. 2011:50). Referring mainly to Europe, Nicolae Gheorghe defined the Roma as a marginalized social group trying to move out of an inferior position, searching for “some kind of respectability” and “equality with other social groups (...), on the basis of a revised perception of their identity” (1997:x).

Moreover, it can be said that the diversity of Roma groups and sub-groups in Europe and particularly in Turkey renders them more fragile since “their composite, fragmented, temporary consistency, tenaciously attached to details and traditions only partially shared makes it difficult for them to cooperate and reach common goals” (Valentino & Orta 2010:11). Non-traditional Roma and those living in poor neighbourhoods or ghetto-type settlements identify only contextually as Roma. On the other hand, the better educated or more “integrated” tend to be prejudicially

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<sup>17</sup> See the activities of the ROMACT Joint Programme of the EC and the CoE (<http://coe-romact.org>) that I have been managing since 2015. The Programme envisages support for local administrations to work together with Roma communities to do better on their social inclusion.

perceived by the Roma as being “mainstreamed” / *gadje* [non-Roma]. This is a different form of invisibilization of Roma and defines the people that “made it out” of the community or out of poverty by taking up education and accessing structures of the majority (see more on invisibility in section 4.1. of this study). Such individuals are considered to not have much more in common with the community than their bloodline (UNFPA - Oprişan 2013). Consequently, the “integrated” Roma are usually not the target of research and policies for the Roma. The most visible – the poorest Roma – get the most exposure in the media and public discourse. This situation is considered by Surdu & Kovacs as reinforcing “a pathetic image of Roma” (2015:9) and is assumed to persist in order to justify policy intervention.

Sigona suggests that top-down policies influence also the identity framing and construction of Roma, having in mind that “policy shapes the way individuals construct themselves as subjects” (2005:743). Nicolae, asserted that the idea of a Roma distinct ethnic group formed around an “identity created by rejection, exclusion or discrimination” tends to be attractive both for academia as well as for policy-makers: “Simplifications for the sake of academic theories and nation-building ideologies have put mixed, socially excluded and ethnic groups such as the Roma within the wrong paradigm of ‘a single and homogenous people’. As with all ethnic European identities, the Roma identity is mostly ideological” (2013:15). Further on, Nicolae claims that the “unity of the Roma is as much a figment of the imagination as is the unity of the Europeans” (Idem:10). Reflecting on other groups in Europe, Surdu & Kovacs argue that the unitary portrayal of the Roma for policy purposes (as it happens with the Sinti in Italy or Germany, the Travellers in the UK or the Ashgali and Egyptians in Albania) is a rather “simplistic racial narrative” which combines “the vagueness of the concept of Roma with the political incentive to address objective problems of poverty and exclusion to confusingly portray Roma both as an ethnic minority and a disadvantaged group” (2015:8).

In contrast with the extremely limited number of NGOs that attempted to advocate for Roma rights before 2004 – 2005 in Turkey, a large number of Roma NGOs started to appear during and after this period (2004 marking the Brussels Summit during which EU-Turkey relations witnessed a positive turning point and 2005 being the year of the start of formal EU negotiations with Turkey), when EU funding for Turkey and specifically for Roma inclusion became available. A facilitating element for Roma self-organization was also the fact that Turkey lifted

the restrictions on association based on ethnicity through the modifications of the Associations' Law in 2004<sup>18</sup>. However, most of the hundreds of Roma NGOs that started to get established legally during that period were considered nothing but “handbag associations” – entities that only hoped to benefit from the incoming funding for the Roma and attempted to serve the power-acquiring interests of some Roma leaders, not necessarily catering for the needs of their communities. To a certain extent, it can be considered that the opening of Turkey towards the EU induced the “awareness” and “mobilization” of Roma groups in Turkey, however the trajectory and the work of these NGOs inclined more towards a rather “artificial awakening”, given the fact that it was mostly triggered by the funding from the EU and the Roma gatekeepers’<sup>19</sup> hopes for gain from the power holders.

The following table lists the policy benchmarks that influenced the status of the Roma in Turkey after 2002:

<b>2002 – 2016 Benchmarks Relevant for Roma Policy-making in Turkey and for the topics explored in this thesis</b>	
2002	Beginning of AKP <sup>20</sup> Rule
	Decision of European Council to start the negotiation with Turkey
2003	First Roma NGO established unofficially in Edirne (EDÇİNKAY) – the NGO gains official status in 2004
2004	Brussels Summit, a positive turning point for EU-Turkey relations
	Law on Associations changed
	Law on Housing Development ammended
2005	Pre-accession negotiations started with the EU
	EU funding becomes available for Turkey
	Law of Local Authorities
2006	256 Roma houses demolished in Küçükbakkalköy / Istanbul
2008	264 Roma houses demolisehd in old “200 Houses” gecekondu in Samsun
2009	AKP Government initiates the “peace process” [barış süreci] with the Kurdish insurgents – this process is called also National Unity and

<sup>18</sup> Law no 5253 – “Dernekler Kanunu” [Associations’ Law], adopted on 4/11/2004, published in the Official Gazette no 25649 of 23/11/2004, <https://www.dernekler.gov.tr/tr/mevzuat/kanun/5253-dernekler-kanunu.aspx>

<sup>19</sup> Formal and informal community leaders, heads of NGOs, politically involved Roma etc.

<sup>20</sup> Justice and Development Party [Tr. *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*] governing since 2002.

	Brotherhood Project [Millî Birlik ve Kardeşlik Projesi] or Democratic Opening [Demokratik Açılım]. This process was put in jeopardy in different occasions by different events and the commitment of the Government has weakened in time
2010	Alevi Opening [Alevi Açılımı]
	Launching of the Roma Opening
2014	Inclusion of Roma issues in the Visa Liberalisation package
2016	Adoption of a shorter version of the Roma Strategy with its First Action Plan for 2016-2018

Notwithstanding, since the 2010 Roma Opening and until the Roma Strategy was officially adopted by the Government in 2016, the only concrete larger scale policy that started to be implemented, as a highlight of the “promises” made in 2010 by the (then) Prime Minister Erdoğan in prioritizing the Roma needs<sup>21</sup>, was “Roma housing”.

## **1.2. Theoretical Framework: Perspectives on Roma Poverty and Social Exclusion**

### ***1.2.1. Inter-relation Between the Concepts of Poverty and Exclusion***

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon characterized by lack of capacity of individuals to access resources and to gain sufficient and sustained income, by inadequate education and by poor health, leading to persistent vulnerability and powerlessness. Consequentially, poverty obstructs the ability of individuals to make proper choices, to maintain a decent quality of life and ultimately to realise their full potential as human beings (Sen 1992), as further discussed in sections 4.2.1., 4.2.3.

<sup>21</sup> Additionally, smaller scale provisions have been considered, mostly through short-term employment opportunities, as the max. 9 months unskilled jobs offered to Roma by İŞKUR in different provinces of Turkey. In 2014, I joined a delegation of ZDA to Diyarbakır aiming to monitor the implementation of this programme. The İŞKUR representatives claimed that the implementation of such a programme is challenging and comes in contradiction with the legal regulations they have as public authority. They complained about the fact that they received the “order” to implement the programme from the central level (Ministry of Labour), without the legal clarifications on how to address an ethnic group expressly while the law clearly forbids such a practice. Additionally, another challenge was to identify “who was Roma and who was not”. The president of the Dom Association gave İŞKUR a list of people to be employed in the programme, however when they understood that this was a short term job (to work on cleaning streets and parks for max. 9 months), almost all gave up. Consequently, the İŞKUR representatives further complained about the fact that the Roma (Dom) “do not want to work” inspite of their “efforts”.

and 4.2.4, in connection to the livelihoods framework elements of Chambers & Conway (1991) and Carney (1999). Moreover, poverty is considered to be a form of deprivation that can lead to “deep damage” among individuals and within society (Allen & Thomas 2000:17). In our contemporary societies, poverty is no longer considered to be “a transitory problem” since it gets “transmitted” from one generation to another (Buğra & Keyder 2003:19). Accordingly, where one starts out in life turns out to have a significant influence on where one is likely to end up (Shildrick & Rucell 2015:5). As demonstrated also through some of the narratives of the Roma families targeted by this research, individuals born into multidimensional poverty have difficulties in escaping it; they experience a lifetime of deprivation and transfer that poverty to their children. Moreover, it is also considered that the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next implies also a transmission of attitudes, values and behaviours (Shildrick & Rucell 2015:15). This dissertation suggests that the long-term invisibilization of the Roma in Turkey and the lack of adequate policies to respond to their needs contributed to their marginalization and to an inter-generational continuity of their poverty.

Other factors that prevent people from escaping poverty or that push them even further into poverty are the risk and shocks that their livelihoods have to face (Dercon & Shapiro 2007:93). This is also the case of the poor Roma who live in urban areas in Turkey and who are affected by the risks and shocks generated by the urban transformation projects implemented by the authorities. The poor, including the Roma have been generally living in marginal urban settlements that allowed for their livelihoods survival. These urban settlements called *gecekondu* are affordable spaces that are usually situated in areas allowing easy access to urban centres and to the resources they need in order to survive (see further section 5.2.1.1. on the *gecekondu* space). The fact that new governmental policies increasingly target these areas with urban renewal projects constitutes an important risk for the poor inhabitants of these settlements and especially for tenants who do not qualify for alternative housing and are evicted. These people are further forced into deprivation and the chances of recovery for the youngest generation become slimmer after displacement.

Limited assets and inability to pursue education, loss of assets or employment, vulnerability and lack of protection against risks (such as evictions or occupational hazards) become leading factors of persisting inter-generational

“poverty traps”. These have also damaging effects on self-esteem and physical and mental development of individuals experiencing it (Hulme & Shepherd 2003; Shepherd 2006). Living in continuous insecurity generated by poverty or lack of adequate housing and homelessness is a stigmatizing experience and leads to loss of social dignity. Oscar Lewis (1969, 1971, 1996, 1998) considered that poor people foster strong feelings of marginality, helplessness, powerlessness, dependency, inferiority, personal unworthiness, and cannot forge ties with the rest of the society, believing that the existing institutions do not serve their interests and needs. Gubrium et al. (2014) argued that this type of shame causes people “to retreat socially, to lose faith in themselves and to find their sense of agency eroded”. Notwithstanding, shame and feelings of worthlessness undermine “people’s ability to help themselves” (cited in Schildrick & Rucell 2015:27). Scholars who examined the attitudes and behaviours of the poor have brought into discussion the negative impact of fatalism displayed by the poor, the tendency towards low-status occupations and a certain lack of discipline and continuation (Lewis 1961). Moreover, these tendencies have been explained also as being the effect of isolation and racism that people in such conditions face (Small et al. 2010). The Roma that make the subject of this dissertation have been battling not only poverty and the stigma that comes with it, but have also struggled for the entire course of their lives with the prejudice of the rest of the society and the rejection brought about by their origins. In some cases they have chosen to remain in the *gecekondu* even when they have acquired enough resources to otherwise allow them to move out into better neighbourhoods. It is the resignation that no other place would “accept” them or their lack of trust that they would be able to make it elsewhere that stops them from acting. These perceptions of the self and of the otherness are exacerbated by the constant invisibilization they faced from the side of the authorities.

Lewis (1971) argued that poverty is systemic and hence imposed upon the members of a society, leading to the formation of an “autonomous subculture”, because children are raised into behaviours and attitudes that might perpetuate the inability to escape the so-called “underclass”. In this case, poverty is also associated with underdevelopment (Munck 2005:26) and ultimately can emerge into a “social status” for poor individuals and communities (Allen & Thomas 2000:20). When it comes to Roma communities, centuries of disenfranchising state policies, of exclusion and marginalization have resulted in the association between ethnicity and



labels of poverty and inferiority, conferring them unequal status as citizens of the countries they inhabit. Nevertheless, the reduction of the poor to a social class is considered to be a “key determinant of life chances” (Munck 2005:140). In this case, poor people’s cumulative disadvantages become “mutually reinforcing over time”; they become further excluded and are able to find “neither the economic nor the social resources needed to participate in their society or to retain a sense of social worth” (Gallie & Paugam 2000:370).

The concept of social exclusion was labelled in the 1990s as an overarching form of “new poverty” (Munck 2005:21). It emerged as an opportunity to define the experience of multiple disadvantages and provided a new avenue to understand other factors that influence poverty beyond individual actions. Hills et al. (2002) put emphasis on the fact that the concept of social exclusion enlarged the focus beyond individuals and households to communities and neighbourhoods (cited in Schildrick & Rucell 2015:17). The relation between poverty and exclusion, and their occurrence and causality have been often discussed. Atkinson considers that “poverty, unemployment and exclusion are related” (1998:9). Alongside inequality, they are rather interdependent than “interchangeable” or “co-extensive” concepts (Richmond & Saloojee 2005:3; Mitchell & Shillington 2005:41). Munck sustains the argument that poverty is the main cause of social exclusion (2005:23), while Tilly argues that exclusion itself promotes poverty and that “exits from poverty” depend “on eliminating or bypassing the usual effects of social exclusion” which “lies at the heart of inequality-generating processes” (2007:48). Some scholars also argue that poverty could be a temporary phenomenon, which might not always lead to exclusion (Allen & Thomas 2000:430; Işık & Pınarcıoğlu 2001). Furthermore, Atkinson argues that people “may be poor without being socially excluded” in the same way in which “people may be socially excluded without being poor” (1998:9). In the case of the Roma, getting out of poverty and distancing themselves from the stigmatized spaces of exclusion where their extended families (used to) live, still does not exempt them from being discriminated against. The stigmatized label of ethnicity or of the excluded place of origin follows most of the time those who attempt to escape it, regardless of their economic and social achievements in time.

Social exclusion helps contextualise poverty in social systems and structures. It is assumed to contain an important focus on causality (the underlying contextual factors explaining why some people experience these conditions and vulnerabilities

while others do not) and brings awareness on the multi-dimensionality of deprivation (Hickey & du Toit 2007:2). Moreover, the social exclusion approach offers an analytical framework for a series of concepts such as class, ethnicity, and gender, making more explicit the linkages between them in relation to persistent forms of poverty (Hickey & du Toit 2007:3). Exclusion is described also as a process of disempowering a group by discriminatory practices (Henry et al. 1995:327). The European policy<sup>22</sup> debates on social exclusion have generated a definition that refers to the process of “being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems” which hinders the integration of a person in society (Walker & Walker 1997:8). This multidimensional concept implies therefore a spectrum of unequal relations that contribute to both material and social deprivation or oppression of an individual or a group (Luxton 2005:82; Shakir 2005). Regardless of the source of exclusion (poverty, racism, fear of differences or lack of political power), it is considered that the consequences are the same and that “the social exclusion of individuals and groups can become a major threat to social cohesion and economic prosperity” of the society (Saloojee 2003:10).

The nature of inequality and the distribution of poverty are argued by Turner to be functions of the relationship between citizenship rights and the capitalist marketplace (1986:68). An important role in this context is played by “the mechanisms and institutions that exclude people” (Haan 1998:10) and which perpetuate unequal social relations (Swartz 1997:285). Especially under neoliberals, with their increased interest in the private financial sector, the rule has been shifted “from the people, to the corporations” (Hardisty 2014:2). Accordingly, social exclusion is viewed as “an unfortunate but inevitable side effect of global economic realignment” (Beall 2002:43), while other approaches argue that “social exclusion represents little more than an unhelpful re-labelling of poverty or acts to distract

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<sup>22</sup> The European Commission (2008) has defined primary and secondary indicators of social inclusion as follows: Primary indicators - At-risk of poverty rate; Persistent at-risk of poverty rate; Relative median poverty risk gap; Long-term unemployment rate; Population living in jobless households; Early school leavers not in education or training; Employment gap of immigrants; Material deprivation; Housing; Self-reported unmet need for medical care; Care utilisation; Child well-being; Secondary indicators – At risk of poverty rate; Poverty risk by household type; Poverty risk by the work intensity of households; Poverty risk by most frequent activity status; Poverty risk by accommodation tenure status; Dispersion around the at-risk-of-poverty threshold; Persons with low educational attainment; Low reading literacy performance of pupils (EC 2008). Academics argue that although “the EU indicators have little to do with the academic social scientists’ measures of social exclusion, they attempt to capture *dynamics* of both persistent poverty and long-term unemployment” (Silver 2007:7)

attention from inequality generated by the workings of the economic system” (Beall 2002:44).

Levitas et al. argue that social exclusion is a process which, besides involving “the lack of denial of resources, rights, goods and services”, also entails the inability of individuals “to participate in the normal relationships and activities available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas”, moreover affecting their quality of life and “the equity and cohesion of society as a whole” (2007:25). The social groups, which find it difficult to get organized and participate in society as the Roma have been, encounter “structural and systemic barriers” and are driven to the margins of society (Saloojee 2005), suffering stigmatization and exclusion. Moreover, social exclusion is seen as a denial of the classic social-democratic notion of citizenship codified by T.H.Marshall (1950) around the civil, political and social rights of the citizen (Munck 2005:22; Walker & Walker 1997:8). Richmond & Saloojee also consider that in order to be able to exercise democratic citizenship, individuals have to have “a relationship with one’s community and the resources necessary to exercise one’s citizenship” (2005:19). Ultimately, inclusion and equal treatment of citizens imply as well the notion of participation of the individuals to different dimensions of social, economic and political life (Berghman 1995; Sen 2001; Saloojee 2005; Allen & Thomas 2000; Hickey & du Toit 2007). Evidence from the research conducted for this dissertation on the Roma in Turkey shows that poverty and lack of prospects, lack of educated elites, poor capacity of civil society organizations which are most of the time only covers for political parties’ support groups, does not allow for real participation in society; instead, it leads to trade-offs for short-term gains. This comes in line with the views of scholars who argue that the poor might “lack the capacity to represent themselves in available socio-political organisations” (Cleaver 2005) and that they can be tempted to “trade away their agency in return for security” (Wood 2003, cited in Hickey & du Toit 2007:9).

The social exclusion approach has been criticized for portraying the excluded as helpless victims. While spaces of marginality can foster forms of political agency for the poor and can allow them to develop survival mechanisms, it cannot be expected that the poorest would be able to “pull themselves” out of poverty through their own means (Hickey & du Toit 2007:3). Social inclusion of disadvantaged individuals and communities requires investments and action to bring about the

conditions for inclusion (Saloojee 2003:10). Although individuals have a very important role as “agents in shaping their life chances” (Alcock 2006:103), it is considered that they also need to be empowered in order to exercise their rights. Often, however, such exercise is obstructed by the different degrees of deprivation that people may face and by their incapacity of being independent and self-sufficient (Barbalet 1993:37). Applying this consideration to the situation of the Roma, the provision of social rights is particularly relevant in the sense that their historical exclusion and incapacity for proper redress undermines their chances of taking full advantage of citizenship rights. On the other hand, as Parekh argues, even if individuals are provided with opportunities, if they lack “the capacity, the cultural disposition, or the necessary knowledge and resources”, they will not be able to benefit from them (2000:41).

Theories of exclusion are also debated alongside social inclusion (Byrne 1999; Levitas 1998; Silver 1994), assuming that if exclusion is the problem, then inclusion should be the answer. One of the definitions of social inclusion given by the World Bank refers to a process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people - disadvantaged on the basis of their identity - to take part in society (WB 2013:xxiv/26). The concept of inclusion is also used alongside integration or as a synonym to it, although there are important differences between the two. Integration implies the involvement of representatives of a minority in the power structures where limited changes can occur. Inclusion, on the other hand, implies a process in which different sides adjust; in this case, the system is supposed to become accommodative to different identity elements of the people to be included. When it comes particularly to the Roma inclusion, the European Commission asks member states to adopt and implement National Roma Integration Strategies, although the process they are supposed to support is that of inclusion<sup>23</sup>, meaning that the national structures implementing the strategies will have to be accommodative and open to change, fostering the participation of Roma (UNDP 2012a:5).

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<sup>23</sup> The European Commission document called “The social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe - Communication from The Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions” states the following: “Measures to overcome Roma exclusion need to be set within the wider framework of European equality, inclusion, and growth policies and to optimize the use of the legal and financial instruments available also to mainstream society. The overall objective is an inclusive society, not a new form of ethnic segregation: any progress which can be achieved in the area of Roma inclusion represents progress too in the inclusion of all ethnic minorities in the EU and vice-versa” (EC 2010c)

Despite the fact that social inclusion has been defined with regards to social exclusion, Jackson (1999) argues that exclusion and inclusion can exist simultaneously, since individuals and groups can be excluded in one domain and included in another. For example, many poor people are included in economic activities, however they remain poor and excluded due to the extremely unfavourable terms of inclusion. Regardless of whether they exploit unregulated economic niches or are incorporated into the labour market under precarious conditions (low wages, no job security, restricted access to social protection etc.), they are excluded from fully accessing public services and the institutions of governance (CPRC 2006:39). Under these conditions, people manage to cope and survive but they remain poor and excluded. A 56 year-old single Roma mother who had her house demolished<sup>24</sup> in Ataşehir / Küçükbakkalköy, struggled to support her family for 10 years after she was evicted. She managed to keep her son in school and pay for her rent in a poor neighbourhood by collecting second-hand clothes and selling them from an improvised counter in the local weekly open-air markets. Although she and her family manage to survive, they seem to be locked in a form of marginality that perpetuates their insecurity. Earning enough to survive, and having employment which allows people only to survive, seems not to be a way to get out of poverty. Consequently, “in-work poverty is an increasingly important explanation of contemporary poverty” (Shildrick & Rucell 2015:5).

Article 30 of the CoE European Social Charter stipulates that “living in a situation of poverty and social exclusion violates the dignity of human beings” and urges member states “to promote access to social rights, in particular employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance” (CoE 1996). Social inclusion calls for validation of diversity as well as for recognition of common experiences and aspirations that people share. It is, as Saloojee puts it, about closing physical, social and economic gaps, which separates people (2003:11).

### ***1.2.2. Implications on the Status of Roma***

Like other peoples, the Roma are heterogeneous also from the point of view of their socio-economic status. The most visible Roma are those who live in poverty

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<sup>24</sup> She sued the municipality for demolishing her house for which she had property deeds. Court trial was still on going in August 2014 when the interview was conducted.

and they carry the stigma of both their condition and origins. Being identified by others as Roma or recognizing their own Roma identity can be stigmatizing and may be the reason that people are looked upon with suspicion. The common denominator for both the poor and the better-off Roma is that they often are socially excluded.

The marginal social and physical spaces poor Roma inhabit emerge into spaces of blame. From this perspective, exclusion is shaped into a spatial dimension that is linked to systematic forms of disadvantage drawing focus on spatial poverty traps. Ultimately, the poor and powerless are excluded, setting up “a dynamic of concentrated deprivation and disadvantage” (Munck 2005:102). The Roma settlements and neighbourhoods targeted by this dissertation are not all situated at a physical distance from the rest of the society. They are rather concentrated in pockets of poverty inside the city, the difference in status and condition segregating them from the rest of the society. It is considered that the spaces inhabited by these people, who are argued sometimes to be unable to adapt to the demands of modern economies, often become spaces of castigation. I argue that, while many poor Roma inhabiting these spaces are trapped in a cycle of poverty and exclusion and suffer repeated shocks (i.e. evictions, relocation, and disruption of livelihoods) they make efforts to cope with the new conditions they have to face within the limits of their capabilities. They exploit marginal resources trying to get by. This situation is identified by a series of scholars as “the poverty of the working poor” (Yaqub 1999, cited in Narayan & Petesch 2007:270). Although they do not manage to attain development and to lift themselves from poverty, they do manage to survive. The very marginal spaces they inhabit and the marginal niches they exploit are those that help them to survive. They are not, however, able to increase their access to productive assets or to achieve better incomes on the labour market and, from this point of view, their vulnerability perpetuates itself.

Writing about the Roma in Europe, Sigona & Vermeersch (2012) argued that they face a set of issues, which are substantially different than those faced by the majority population in terms of spatial segregation, discrimination, low educational attainments, and inter-generational poverty. Education in particular is listed among the primary fields of any intervention plan and policy for the Roma inclusion. Lack of access to education and educational attainment are regarded as the main causes for stagnation and the precarious social condition of Roma. Policymakers tend to argue that education helps people escape poverty. However, certain scholars argue that the

parameters of such an interpretation are difficult to establish due to the fact that it is not clear if it “is education that makes people move out of poverty, or is it that families who manage to offer education to their children are also able to offer their children other opportunities” (Dercon & Shapiro 2007:85). Furthermore, other scholars maintain that educational achievements are differentiated by social background and that the education systems serve those who are most economically advantaged (Reay 2012). In this case, Roberts (2006) claims that education becomes a luxury, not a right, and is no longer facilitating social mobility, in spite of children’s disadvantaged backgrounds. Nevertheless, those who start from an unequal position in the society do not have the same opportunities to be able to advance and move away from poverty and exclusion.

Exploring the causes of Roma people’s poverty and exclusion, it is argued that they are either “a by-product of wider socio-economic changes” or that they have to do with a certain “behavioural and cultural conditioning” impeding their development (Kostka 2015:4). Due to the emergence of attention given to the improvement in Roma conditions, mostly through EU pressure on the candidate and member states, large numbers of policies and projects addressing the Roma have been implemented. However, a paradoxical situation can be observed in which the Roma people’s exclusion persists, despite the expansion of social inclusion projects. In addition, the Roma-targeted policies and projects have also started to encounter an unfavourable effect. The singular focus on the Roma and the employment of a human rights-based approach has triggered critiques on the basis that they seem to “call into question Roma’s very humanity” and that it “risks deepening divisions between Roma and non-Roma” (Friedman 2015:2). Moreover, adding to the human rights concerns, the economic arguments for Roma inclusion, according to which the revenues of the countries where Roma live “would have been substantially higher if the Roma were not excluded from the labour market” (WB 2010:19), seem not to be strong enough for countries to take them up and therefore do not have the desired effect.

Whether or not they are covered by the governmental and civil society’s demarches for Roma inclusion, poor Roma have to continuously identify functional coping strategies, which leads them to incline towards unregulated niches of survival, focusing mainly on managing risks and shocks and not on the sustainable development of their livelihoods. According to Chambers & Conway, a sustainable

livelihood is that which “can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain and enhance its capabilities and assets”, contributes to other livelihoods in short and long term and provides sustainable opportunities for the next generations (1992:7). The elements of a sustainable livelihoods framework are explained further in sections 4.2.2. and 4.2.3. of this study.

Disempowered due to their condition, poor Roma are perpetual recipients of welfare. Moreover, due to the inability to access resources and negotiate with power-holders, some people engage also in illegal livelihood activities with the aim of sustaining their households. For these very reasons however, the poor in general, and in our case the poor Roma are considered “undeserving” poor people. They are blamed for their inabilities or for not putting “enough effort” into taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the market, for altogether lacking moral virtues, for “deferring gratification, planning ahead, and making sacrifices for future benefit” (Goldberg 1993:169). Majority populations tend to blame them because of the way they live, considering that this is the way they “have chosen to live” and from this point of view they characterize Roma through ascribed “moral laxity” (neglect of parental duties, loose marital ties), “dishonesty” (welfare sponging and fraud), “vice” (drug addiction, alcoholism) and “downright criminality” (youth hooliganism, car stealing, mugging) (Bauman 1999). Moreover, receiving and becoming dependent upon welfare often generates negative emotions such as shame (Scheff 1988) and stigma, which can undermine “the very qualities individuals require in order to recognize and exercise rights” (Barbalet 1993:54).

The situation of the Roma is often generalized and they are frequently considered responsible for their own poverty and exclusion. Even their spending habits and patterns are often subjected to stigmatization. The fact that families living in poor housing and even those living in improvised shelter have had the means to acquire mobile phones, TV or music sets and display parabolic antennas on their roofs is difficult to accept by outsiders in the context of their poverty. Moreover, the fact that some would spend their (otherwise uncertain) income on expensive items or would pay the income earned in a day on a single rich meal for the family (without thinking about the next day) is criticized by the rest of the society and even by those Roma who managed to get away from poverty. “Conspicuous consumption” becomes an important element of distinction between the poor and the rest of the society. And although research shows that such behaviours are linked to strategies of



the poor to improve their self-esteem and to avoid the social effects of stigmatization, in an attempt to mask poverty, they seem to encounter the very stigmatization that they set out to avoid in the first place (Hamilton 2012).

There are complex implications generated by poverty that many Roma individuals and communities are facing for long periods of time, some inherited from previous generations. Different studies indicate that especially the chronically poor manage to cope with their vulnerable situation by developing patron-client type of relations that allow them to produce desirable, immediate outcomes (access to food, health services, welfare etc.) by trading-off their longer-term needs and rights (ability to accumulate assets, right to change employer or vote freely etc.) (CPRC 2016:39). Therefore, the coping strategies of the poor (who do not have “reserves” and are predisposed to the vulnerability of continuous shocks - related to sudden changes in livestock or human health, economic condition, conflicts etc.) are those that can ensure short-term survival but ultimately undermine their wellbeing in the medium to long-term (CPRC 2016:42). Nevertheless, what is therefore passed from one generation to another of poor people, are the values, attitudes, aspirations and lack of confidence of the poor that have suffered “transformations” due to precariousness and stigma.

Getting out of poverty and potentially escaping social exclusion are not easy tasks for vulnerable populations. Research shows that household assets and community infrastructure are important elements allowing people to move out of poverty. At the same time, shocks and risks keep people in poverty (Dercon & Shapiro 2007:109). Hulme & Shepard (2003), for instance, argue that people who experience poverty for at least five years or more are very unlikely to escape from it. The mobility of individuals and households out of poverty can occur in certain conditions and according to numerous variables. Referring mainly to the chronically poor, Godinot et al. emphasize that “when systems of social protection do not work, do not exist, or simply do not reach” them, “family and community solidarity is the best defence against deprivation” (2007:301). The relationship of Roma households with their extended families and the rest of the community living in a given poor settlement becomes a mechanism of coping and ultimately resisting exclusion. Yaquib points out that “education, intelligence and hard work are not enough per se to escape from poverty” and that the “access points and the advantageous opportunities family can provide” (and I would add here community networks, as in the case of

Roma settlements covered by my research) are essential (1999:19, cited in Narayan & Petesch 2007:257) also for Roma people's survival.

As mentioned previously, while poverty and exclusion can be mutually reinforcing, the situation of different Roma communities across Europe as well as in Turkey proves that poverty is not the only reason that they are excluded. Wealthy Roma, as well as educated and achieving Roma, including Roma women, continue to face discrimination and exclusion. At the core of their marginalization stands society's perennial prejudice against the Roma and the lack of effective inclusive policies and practices of the states. Nevertheless, Roma social inclusion continues to be on the agenda of governments and the European institutions since it constitutes both a human rights obligation as well as an economic necessity.

### **1.3. The Organization of the Study**

This dissertation presents the analysis of the information gathered from relevant scholarly and policy sources and the data collected from the field, in the context of poverty and social exclusion of the Roma in Turkey.

The study focuses on the extent to which Turkish state policies have propagated a process of exclusion towards the Roma and how the Roma have responded to it. Different mechanisms of survival and livelihoods strategies employed by the Roma were explored, in particular in relation to the effect that the housing policies have on them. The "housing for the Roma" or "housing for the poor" initiatives of the Turkish Government, announced during the 2010 "Roma Opening", as well as the urban regeneration and renewal projects carried out across Turkey are examined through two case studies carried out in Küçükbakkalköy district of Istanbul and the "200 Houses" scheme in Samsun.

**Chapter 1** has introduced the background elements and the core subject of the research. The chapter provided an overview of the situation of the Roma in Europe and in Turkey. The main landmarks of Roma identity and status formation in Europe have been discussed, focusing on relevant state policies and EU requirements that attempt to address the vulnerability of the Roma and the spaces of exclusion they occupy. A preamble was further provided on the situation of the Roma in Turkey, their diversity and specificity, the main policy benchmarks that influenced their status throughout history and in the modern context of the Turkish - European Union

relations. The chapter included also an exposition of the study's theoretical framework, conceptualizing the relation between poverty and social exclusion and their implications on the status of the Roma. The chapter discussed how multigenerational poverty experiences prove to have a damaging effect on the capacity of people to look for redress. Poverty emerges, at times, into a "social status" for poor individuals and communities. Besides being passed from a generation to another, poverty also entraps people into spaces of disadvantage. And, although these spaces can help people survive, by allowing for exploitation of marginal resources, they can also obstruct people's chances to attain development. Further on, the chapter analysed different perspectives on exclusion as a multidimensional concept that implies the existence of unequal relations and the propagation of powerlessness, and argues that the exclusion of Roma is not only due to poverty; at the core of their marginalization stands society's perennial prejudice against them and the lack of effective inclusive policies and practices of the states. Alongside concepts of poverty and exclusion, social inclusion theories and policies are discussed, with a focus on the EU approach to addressing disadvantaged minority groups, in particular the Roma.

**Chapter 2** presents the methodology of the research, by introducing its main questions and assumptions, informed by the exploration of data and the case study conducted between 2012 and 2014 in two urban settings in Turkey. The chapter gives an overview of the field research that supported the thesis with empirical data, including the selection rationale of the particular case studies. Furthermore, it provides the background and the context of the selected cases, from the perspective of different narratives and reactions to displacement, methods of negotiation with power and diversification of coping mechanisms employed by marginalized Roma. This methodological chapter presents the steps taken for data collection and the prerequisites of accessing data. It describes the main informant categories, the type of sources targeted and the main tools employed to access relevant information in the field. A constructivist approach was used when interacting with the informants of the research, by taking into account the fact that realities described are socially constructed and constantly evolving, by collaborating closely with the participants in the research and understanding their background and listening to their stories. Moreover, the questions of my own positionality are discussed, including the advantages and disadvantages of being both a researcher but also a Roma activist

with past experience and direct involvement in the field of Roma inclusion at European level and in Turkey. The chapter reviews the illustrative elements that supported the arguments of the study and the implications of this research on the policy development for the Roma and other vulnerable groups in the region.

**Chapter 3** introduces the particularities of the policies regarding Roma in Europe and in Turkey, in the context of EU conditionalities, by focusing on the differences of their status and similarity of their condition. The benchmarks of Roma identity formation and emancipation in Europe are presented alongside an analysis of the specific targeted policies on Roma and the broad citizenship concept to which the Roma in Turkey are bound. The chapter provides a comprehensive account of the specificity of the Roma's situation in Turkey, with all different groups that development policies seek to address simultaneously: the Roma, the Dom, the Lom and the Abdal. Historical accounts are used in mapping the dynamics of the evolution of the Roma issue and Roma identity assertion in Europe and in Turkey, as well as the major events that have influenced their trajectory, incorporating elements related to the rooting of stigma as well as their nation-building demarches. The implementation of Roma targeted policies in Europe is discussed from the perspective of the requirements that Turkey, as a candidate country for the EU, needs to respond to in terms of addressing the issues faced by the Roma. The place of the Roma in the post-2002 demarches of the Turkish Government towards EU integration is analysed together with its policy initiatives directed at the Roma. The role of the EU conditionalities for Turkey, AKP's power dynamics and the formation of Roma civil society is discussed from the perspective of development demarches for the Roma communities in Turkey.

**Chapter 4** focuses on one systematic policy that influences the status of the Roma in Turkey: housing provision as determinant of social inclusion. The lack of proper implementation of this policy leads to further social exclusion of the poor Roma. The similar effect of neoliberal urban renewal / transformation / regeneration projects and the reshaping of urban space in Turkey are analysed from the perspective of the effect they have on Roma communities. For a comparative and informing perspective, the chapter also presents a general review of the international and European policies and practices on adequate housing provision, which have been given as prerequisites for Roma inclusion. The chapter further examines the parallel between the housing policies in Turkey, with the "housing for the poor" as neoliberal

form of welfare provision and the urban renewal programmes that deprive people and make them unable to pursue survival strategies. Details are also provided on these policies' effect on the human capital, alongside individual and collective mobilization for re-creation of livelihood strategies and influencing relevant sustainable state policies. The spaces of tolerance and survival of *gecekondu* (developed forms of urban slums) are introduced by exploring further both their vulnerability and their capacity to build safety nets for the most disadvantaged Roma, in the context of political and entrepreneurial policies of urban regeneration and renewal.

**Chapter 5** reviews perspectives on the different forms of invisibilization of Roma, the spectrum of coping mechanisms that poor Roma employ and their strategies of survival in urban settings. The challenges of managing vulnerable livelihoods are reviewed, by taking into account the implications of livelihoods assets and strategies of survival that the Roma can have at their disposal. The chapter examines the involvement of the Roma in the informal sector, their level of access to the social welfare system, labour and employment opportunities as important elements of securing livelihoods in the context of urban challenges. It also considers the deprivation of the Roma alongside their capacity to cope with old and new spaces of exclusion. In this context, a general picture is provided on the advantages and disadvantages of living in a "*gecekondu mahallesi*" (slum / squatter settlement) / "*Roman mahallesi*" (Roma neighbourhood), as well as in the new government provided housing compounds. From this perspective, an introduction to the challenges of managing urban livelihoods is articulated.

**Chapter 6** contains the general conclusions of the research. It brings forward the main arguments developed throughout the study in regards to the impact of poverty and social exclusion on the status of Roma and the implications of the state policies on the perspective for inclusion of Roma communities. Moreover, the conclusions of the study summarize the main narratives that illustrate the effects of housing policies in Turkey, with their implications on the livelihoods of the Roma communities. Based on these narratives, and on a review of the mechanisms of survival that the Roma employ, in the context of their marginality, the chapter puts forward the potential necessary preconditions for the development of Roma communities and their social inclusion.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter discusses the methodological tools used during the research for data analysis of this dissertation, presenting the details of the case studies that the thesis draws from and the implications of my own personal and professional background.

After the formulation of the main questions of the research, the preliminary data collection started, including theoretical academic background papers and other relevant documents published in different languages to which I had access (English, Turkish, Romanian and French).

Following a fieldwork plan, throughout 2012 - 2013, and some follow-up incursions in 2014, I completed my field research in Turkey, visiting settlements and conducting interviews with Roma and non-Roma, inhabitants of different settlements, community leaders, civil society representatives and public authorities. After field visits and interviews, data collection continued with drafting field notes and review of findings, while analysing relevant information from legal and policy documents, books, reports and articles. Moreover, certain samples of data (recorded in field notes and diaries and never published before), formerly collected during my years of study and work in Turkey were also consulted for the purposes of this dissertation (notes and documents about the emerging of Roma NGOs, the development of policies for Roma in Turkey and urban regeneration in different areas in Turkey).

### **2.1. Research Questions**

The central question of my research focuses on the extent in which the Turkish state propagated a process of exclusion towards the Roma. Moreover, it looks into the coping mechanisms employed by the Roma to respond to it.

Critical sub-questions that support the findings of the main research query of my dissertation are the following:

- What was the impact of the post-2002 governmental policies on the Roma communities in Turkey, after the AKP came into power and started the negotiations with the EU?
- How have the Roma strategized and positioned themselves when

dealing with these policies of the state and which mechanisms of survival have they employed?

- What was the influence of the housing policies on the poverty and social exclusion of the Roma?

This was illustrated through two case studies that analysed particularly the effects of the housing policies for the poor (“housing for the Roma” in the framework of the Governmental Roma Opening of 2010) and of the general urban regeneration measures carried out across Turkey, which have been affecting to a great extent the poor Roma communities.

My research inquiry applies particularly to the timeframe period of 2002 (start of AKP rule) up to 2014 (end of my field research), however it makes the link with the previous policy measures that influenced the status of the Roma regardless of their invisibility as a distinct rights-bearing group.

## **2.2. The Case Studies**

As a methodological tool to respond to the research’s questions and illustrate different forms of Roma exclusion, two qualitative case studies using a variety of data sources were conducted in two different cities in Turkey: Istanbul and Samsun.

The case studies looked at the situation of the Roma by taking up the multi-dimensional implications of housing provision vs. deprivation of housing rights. The research concentrated on the elements of two governmental initiatives, which implied both (directly or indirectly) different forms of displacement of the Roma:

a). The “Roma housing” [*Roman konutu*] provision envisaging to benefit directly the Roma – a practice taken up by some local authorities in municipalities with large numbers of Roma and as highlighted further during the AKP government’s Roma Opening Summit in 2010;

b). The “urban transformation project” implemented throughout Turkey by state institutions and which has been targeting the poorest settlements, particularly those inhabited by the Roma.

The cases analysed made a diagnosis of the effects of displacement as well as of the impact of “affordable” housing policy on the Roma communities. These housing policies were examined by considering housing as primary livelihood

prerequisite, indicator for social inclusion and development.

The research explored further the livelihoods strategies employed by the Roma before and after the official implementation of these housing policies in Turkey. In this context, the studies touched upon the ways in which Roma negotiate with power and looked at the Turkish Roma individual and collective mechanisms of survival in these particular circumstances.

### ***2.2.1. Case Studies' Locations and Context***

The settings of the Case Studies that informed this research are situated in two urban areas: in Istanbul - the largest metropolitan area of Turkey with officially over 14 million people and in Samsun, a city in the Northern part of the country, within the Black Sea region, with a population of over half a million people.

#### ***2.2.1.1. Küçükbakalköy case in Istanbul***

In Istanbul, the case study focuses on the Küçükbakalköy area of Ataşehir district, situated on the “Asian” side of the city.

Since July 2006, the gentrification plan of this area included the gradual demolition of 256 Roma houses of a *gecekondu* type. The families were gradually evicted, the municipality being in charge of the process. The former inhabitants interviewed claimed that they were not properly informed about what the entire process would entail. Ultimately, the negotiation with the inhabitants - in terms of settling the compensation payment for their properties and relocation - was handed to a construction company. Families scattered all over Istanbul, according to their financial means, being hosted by extended family members or other acquaintances. A significant number of families settled together in two different neighbourhoods [*mahalle*]: Nişantepe (Çekmeköy district) and Paşaköy (Sancaktepe district), at around 30 Km distance from Küçükbakalköy, on the same Asian side of Istanbul. Other families did have the economic means to secure rented accommodation elsewhere and had to live in improvised barracks with no access to public services, others are said to have left Istanbul altogether.

In the improvised settlement of Paşaköy, at the time of my field visits, there were around 40 households accommodated in improvised shacks, on a piece of land



situated at the crossroads between Pendik, Sancaktepe and Sultanbey municipalities, around 40 kilometres away from city centre. Besides the families who came after the demolitions in Küçükbakkalköy, in the same settlement there were also families from Ankara and Gebze who could not find or could not afford to rent or who did not find work elsewhere.

People have had a hard time pursuing the same occupations that helped them to get by in the old neighbourhoods because, they say, in the new settings the earnings have to be split between money for travel [Tr. “*yol parası*”] and money for food [Tr. “*ekmek parası*”]. Children of the displaced families generally do not attend school, because their parents cannot provide an official proof of residence for their registration. In 2014, an activist helped some of the children to get enrolled as “guest students” in the nearby school; however staying in school has been a great challenge since parents could not pay for their necessities, given that only the required school uniform costs around 250 TL [78 Euro] / child.

During fieldwork, I visited repeatedly and I interviewed different families in all these locations. Additionally, I interviewed people who remained on the spot after demolition, being reluctant to relocate and continuing to live in the few houses still standing (but still on the demolition list) or in barracks on the grounds of their demolished houses, in the vicinity of the rapidly built apartment blocks of the area. Despite the fact that the construction companies contracted by the municipality informed the people about the imminent demolition, they continued to inhabit the place in completely insalubrious conditions, where municipality services were no longer provided (no garbage collection, no running water, and no electricity). These families gained their living by collecting scrap and other junk that piled up around makeshift barracks and tents. On the site of the former Roma neighbourhood in Küçükbakkalköy, I also interviewed a family who “resisted” the decision of the authorities to destroy their home, by suing the municipality for wrongful treatment both before the Turkish courts as well as before the European Court of Human Rights. Their case continued for almost 8 years before being concluded in favour of the plaintiff.

#### 2.2.1.2. The “200 Houses” scheme in Samsun

In Samsun, my research focused on the “200 Houses” neighbourhood that was built to host the displaced Roma from an old *gecekond* settlement that had the same name and was demolished by the municipality in 2008. The “200 Houses” TOKI apartment block scheme in Samsun has been considered by the authorities as a model of housing provision for “low income groups”, particularly Roma. The scheme includes in fact 264 houses (50 sq. meters each) and “social infrastructures”, accommodating approximately 1500 people, and was built, under a contract awarded by TOKI and the municipality, to a company called Se Building Construction [tr. *Se Yapı İnşaat*].

In 2008, following a Municipal Council decision, the demolition of the old Roma neighbourhood in question (“*teneke mahallesi*” [shantytown]) was conducted with the support of armoured police forces in order to avoid any incidents coming from the approximately 2000 people that had to be relocated, since some of them did not agree with the decision and did not want to move at the time. The demolition of the neighbourhood was reflected in the media and has been the subject of examination by different rights organizations. The Housing Rights Commission of the Samsun Community Centre [*Halkevi*] visited the neighbourhood (on 07.08.2008) and petitioned against the municipality’s “commerce oriented practices” [Tr. “*tüccar belediyeçilik*”]<sup>25</sup>, which allegedly put profit before its citizens’ welfare (HE 2008).

However, this was not the first displacement for some of the Roma inhabitants of the old “200 Houses” neighbourhood. Local people and the authorities estimate that most of the Roma came to Samsun from Greece in the 1920s, during the population exchanges (Samsun Governorate 2011:47). This led to the establishment of the initial Roma shantytown in 1924. This first settlement continued to exist until 1994, when it was demolished by the authorities and most of the Roma were forced to move to the (now - old) “200 Houses” neighbourhood.

The Mayor at the time of allocation of the so called “200 Houses” apartment blocks, in 2008, allegedly promised that the housing units would be given for free to

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<sup>25</sup> During the interviews with the local authorities in Samsun, in 2014, some officials spoke about a piece of land situated between the 200 Houses and the Yavuz Selim Roma neighbourhoods which they intended to sell to a company who wanted to build a factory in the area. Their intention was to sell the land at the highest price to the company and only with part of the money received to buy land elsewhere for the Roma who had to be relocated due to the fact that some houses in Yavuz Selim were placed in an area prone to floods.

the new owners. However, under the pretext to better “integrate” the people in the “apartment culture”, a “small fee” was imposed as a condition for moving in (Konut Projeleri 2013). Although many did not understand clearly what they were getting into or just hoped that the decision would change later on (mostly encouraged by the 2010 Roma Opening during which the Prime Minister Erdoğan himself promised “houses” to the Roma), the Roma entered into legal agreements under which they had to pay 150 or 167 TL [around 50 Euro] on a monthly basis for 15 years for the new houses. Moreover, it was at the time understood by the Roma that both water and electricity would be provided for free. At the time of the field research, people complained that the buildings have not been subscribed to these utilities, in spite of the fact that the municipality was still the administrator of the compounds. However, more than two years after moving in, some people received retroactive overcharged bills, which they could not pay. Two years after moving in, a group of Roma living in the “200 Houses” apartments filed a legal complaint to the Consumer Court stating that the authorities got them into debt fully aware of the fact that the Roma would not be able to pay since they did not have any regular income. At its turn, the Metropolitan Municipality of Samsun also sued the debtors demanding that they vacate the premises. One of the Roma who sued and whom I interviewed during my field research stated that “those who forcibly destroyed our homes and put us in TOKI houses want now to throw us out of TOKI as well”. On January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011, a pro-bono lawyer representing the Roma plaintiffs forwarded a request for investigation and a legal complaint against the municipality, claiming that the quality of the apartments given to the Roma was substandard in comparison to other houses built by TOKI. The file stated that poor quality materials were used for construction, that all bathrooms’ pipes leaked on the floors and ventilation spaces for heaters were wrongly built putting people in danger of poisoning. The same lawyer, together with one of the inhabitants – the president of the “264 Houses Roma Culture Support and Solidarity Association” – requested an expert investigation by the Chamber of Construction Engineers on the 25.06.2012. On the 28.06.2012, a report was issued stating that the buildings presented collapsed concrete surfaces and cracks, that sewage channels were insufficient and often caused overflow, that bathrooms and kitchen sanitary fittings were leaking, the frames of windows and doors on the ground floors were dislocated from walls and the electrical boards were endangered

by the continuous flooding of the basements which also caused persistent humidity and bad smell<sup>26</sup>. The condition described prevailed also during my field visit in 2013.

Moreover, according to the inhabitants and to the housing scheme's municipal administration, another source of distress had to do with the fact that some families had received title deeds for apartments other than those in which they were accommodated. The unrecorded switch of the apartments was made due to the fact that the received apartments were not suitable for the size of the family. In addition to this mix-up, more title deeds were distributed than the actual number of apartments available and, as a result, some families were left without apartments and were given the basements or refuge shelters of the buildings to live in, regardless of the fact that these spaces were not built for living purposes.

Besides interviewing people in the "200 Houses" apartment block neighbourhood, I interviewed also families and community leaders (including the *mukhtar*, the religious sects' leaders, NGOs representatives and inhabitants) in the nearby Roma neighbourhood called Yavuz Selim *mahallesi*. Additionally, I visited and spoke also with families in the Tekkeköy settlement, a neighbourhood situated on another side of Samsun, which at the time of the visit (2013) was on standby for demolition by the municipality. The authorities planned to construct a sports arena on the land on which the houses of the Roma stood and stated that the Roma could be moved elsewhere, where the municipality would build houses for them. The purpose of approaching the families in Tekkeköy during the research was to compare their situation with that of those in the "200 Houses"; to see how they learned about the upcoming demolition (with no clear official date), if and how they prepared for it, how they coped with poverty and what were their prospects for the future. Moreover, from this example, it became visible how the authorities did not seem to take into account the experiences of previous similar situations.

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<sup>26</sup> Two pages Report (in Turkish) with the subject: "Samsun, 200 Houses Neighbourhood, on the TOKI Housing in Çanik" (Çanik is a district municipality of Samsun).

## **2.3. Data Collection and Processing**

### **2.3.1. Preliminary Research Methods and Approaches**

Following an inductive approach in examining the issues targeted by the study within their own context, the research employed a variety of qualitative methods including literature review, collection of primary and secondary documentation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (in person and by phone / Skype, recorded either on iPhone audio files or through note-taking), using direct and participant observation.

Before starting the research, a critical review was performed on relevant literature and theory related to poverty and social exclusion and related livelihoods strategies of people living in poverty (mainly based on Chambers & Conway's framework for sustainable livelihoods), the Turkish approach to ethnicity and vulnerability, existing policy and practices on Roma inclusion at European level and in Turkey etc. An overview of the Roma issues and related scholarship in Turkey was incorporated as well.

Relevant primary and secondary documentation was collected and reviewed on Roma in Turkey (books, articles, reports of Turkish NGOs and INGOs, EU reports and policy documents), on the Turkish legislation, the governmental 2010 Roma Opening follow-up documents, policy papers and plans, relevant social media (facebook groups discussing / advocating for different urban regeneration cases etc.) and web sites postings etc. Documentation continued throughout the research and during the writing process. Data that gradually appeared on new regulations or changes in the approach of the authorities in charge of the Roma issue was incorporated (e.g.: ministerial ownership of Roma issues and the preparatory consultations and documents for the Strategy for Roma continued for years until it was issued in a short version in 2016).

Before conducting the interviews in the communities, I undertook preliminary assessment visits in some of the areas of the selected case study locations. Formal and informal community leaders as well as other community members were approached for support in organising the interviews. Previously secured personal connections were used to identify and contact relevant respondents. Informal discussions with similar groups of respondents as well as with academics

and experts focusing on relevant topics helped in cross-referencing findings obtained through interviews. I also used intermediaries (community or NGO representatives) in two cases to convey my questions and get alternative responses, verifying the responses, especially those related to the receipt of aid and its alleged conditionality. In other cases as well, after trying to conduct certain interviews myself, due to the reactions of the people, I had to approach other people to ask the same questions on my behalf. That was because the respondents (who did not know me at all) would perceive any outsider questioning them (and writing their answers on the paper or sometimes asking to record them) as being a “journalist” or somebody “from the municipality” who would potentially be able to help them. As a result, they would either be very minimalist in their answers or would elaborate exaggerated responses.

A constructivist approach (Seale 1999) was employed when interacting with the field informants believing that some of the realities described are socially constructed and constantly evolving. The choice for such an approach was made having in mind that one of the advantages of the constructivist approach is the close collaboration between the researcher and the participants, which can enable them to tell their stories (Crabtree & Miller 1999). Through the stories they tell, the participants are able to describe their views of reality and this can lead to a better understanding of the participants’ actions (Lather 1992). In the case of my research, this referred also to the question why people felt indebted or supportive towards the political elite that played an important role in disfranchising and rendering them more excluded than before (e.g: homeless). From this perspective, the idea of “background” (Seale 1999) was taken into account when collecting the data and conducting the analysis, since the background would explain “human behaviourism in relation to social structures such as capacities and the dispositions of people to act in a certain way” in a given context (Augustin 2015:130).

### **2.3.2. Details of Field Research**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted alongside unstructured interviews and they were used when the context and the setting of the research required flexibility in investigating the underlying motives of certain actions of the respondents. A total of 69 interviews (out of which 32 recorded) were conducted

during the research. From these, 28 were conducted with people affected by the urban regeneration in Küçükbakkalköy / Istanbul, 22 with different respondents in Samsun and 19 with various authorities, policy makers and representatives of relevant civil society organisations and institutions from Istanbul and Ankara, as well as from Brussels and Strasbourg.

The informants of the research were the following key groups:

- Roma individuals (different aged women, men, children<sup>27</sup>) and families from the targeted communities, who have been affected by the housing policies in Turkey. These were the families who moved away in rented or alternative mortgaged apartments, those who lived in tents or shacks, or who went to live in other areas of the city together with their extended families), but also the families who did not move but waited in the old neighbourhoods for demolition / relocation. Different household / family types were selected for interviews (female-headed households, young couples, elderly couples), comprising nuclear and extended families with multi-generational layers. Another criteria of selection of interviewed families included different types of income, occupations and community status;
- Roma and non-Roma, local and national NGO representatives in Turkey, members of formal and informal civil society networks;
- Representatives of public authorities (governorates, ministries relevant for Roma issue – e.g.: Ministry of Family and Social Policies, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, İŞKUR – Turkish Labour Agency, as well as TOKI, municipalities, *mukhtars* [neighbourhood administrative headmen] and the municipal administrators for the housing schemes that make the subject of the case study);
- Representatives of European institutions in Turkey (e.g.: European Commission Delegation), the European Commission in Brussels and the Council of Europe in Strasbourg;
- Activists and lawyers defending particular cases in the research targeted settings (e.g.: the case of a group of inhabitants of “200

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<sup>27</sup> Only two children took part in the interviews. See section 2.3.4. below on the ethical considerations regarding these interviews.

Houses” scheme against TOKI; the late Yuksel Dum case against the municipality and Kaymakamlık [District Governorate] in Küçükbakkalköy and Ataşehir in Istanbul etc.);

The Case Studies conducted in different locations of targeted areas of Küçükbakkalköy / Istanbul and “200 Houses” scheme / Samsun brought up the experiences and viewpoints of the participants in the research. Moreover, it incorporated a multi-perspective analysis of the problems described by presenting the position of different actors and the interaction between them. The exploration of these sources attempted to ensure the triangulation of the research, to respond to its ethical need to confirm validity of the processes described.

For the purpose of triangulation, to overcome potential weakness and bias, I also explored the opinions of different informants, either by integrating some of them in the process (asking them to join me during some of the field visits) or by sharing the interpretation of the data collected (in informal separate discussion or during various workshops, seminars and conferences I attended in Turkey). This allowed for discussion and helped in clarifying the interpretation of the data as well as contributed with some additional perspectives on the issues under study. In addition, during different field visits and unstructured discussions with the participants in my research, I used direct observation in order to gather information.

Mainly semi-structured and unstructured interviews were preferred for the field research, for the flexibility that it gave to orient the questions depending on the direction of the discussion, being able to prompt and probe deeper into the given situations.

### **2.3.3. Field Data Recording and Processing**

Note taking was an important part of the field data gathering. Audio recording (iPhone audio files) was used only in the cases that allowed for it, with the consent of the participants. Both the recording and the note taking during the field research were done in Turkish (except for the representatives of entities outside Turkey, hence organisations / institutions from Brussels and Strasborg which was in English).

The recorded interviews were transcribed in Turkish and only the parts



decided to be included in the thesis have been marked and translated in English. After transcription of interviews, and systematising the notes taken, and initial corroboration of the information with the other type of data collected, another series of in-person and telephone / Skype interviews with relevant parties took place in order to consolidate the initial drafting of findings.

Different parts of the data contained by the statements of the people interviewed were coded / marked according to a structure of topics that were decided to be treated in the dissertation. During the writing process, relevant excerpts for the different sections and points of the chapters of the thesis were selected from the interviews and included in the text.

Other visual data in the form of pictures was collected, documenting the environment and the state of the settlements and some of the households where research took place.

#### **2.3.4. Anonymization of Data and Ethics**

In full awareness of the SOAS's guidelines on "Using Personal Data in Research: A Code of Practice for Staff and Students", my field research was conducted by paying attention to the privacy, wellbeing, anonymity and informed consent of the participants. Consent of the field respondents to record their testimonies and responses to the specific questions of the interviews was taken only in a verbal form, by taking into account existing cultural and personal sensitivities.

The respondents involved in my study were made aware of the purpose of my questions and the use of the responses. At times, the purpose of the inquiry had to be explained in different manners, more simplistically, to make some respondents understand clearly what they participated into, moreover since some people had difficulties in making the difference between questioning for the massmedia and academic research. Based on the experience of some respondents, the image of an outsider who asks questions, takes notes or records is affiliated only with journalism or with some authority figure that might have something to do with their legal situation. Consequently, these concerns were taken into account and clarifications made in lengthier discussions with the responders.

Two children / teenagers took also part in my interviews. In Küçükbakkalköy, I spoke with one 16 years old boy who was present during his mother's interview and

who stepped into the conversation, describing his feelings about the lose of their home and how this traumatic event changed their lives. In Samsun (Tekkeköy neighbourhood), a 15 years old girl gave accounts about how they make a living by selling second hand clothes or beggining in town. For both children I received the verbal consent of their family members before asking them further questions (the mother and father of the 16 years old boy and the mother and two siblings of the 15 years old girl were present on the spot).

No personal identification data was collected from the respondentsi the focus of the research being their experiences in connection to the research topic. Respondents' anonymity was taken into consideration and no names or other identification details were used in the text of this dissertation.

Only a few community / NGO leaders' names were openly mentioned with their approval. In the case of Elmas Arus, who is mentioned and quoted in this study, she expressly wanted to be openly mentioned because she considered that her experiences could help others, and from this point of view, her "contribution" being important for awareness-raising, especially in the eventuality of a future publishing of this study. Additionally, the name of Yuksel Dum<sup>28</sup>, who took part on my interviews as well and whose case was covered numerous times by the media, appears explicitly in my dissertation. Since he wanted his legal case against authorities to be public, he expressly wanted his name to appear in my written documentation. Sadly, Yuksel passed away by the time this thesis was finalized.

## **2.4. Access to Data and Challenges**

The motivation for this research was prompted by my experiences as activist working with the Roma communities and NGOs in Europe and particularly in Turkey. The advantages I had and used in accessing this field of research were my own mixed ethnic background, my knowledge of Romanes and fluency in Turkish, my 4 years direct experience of working with the Turkish speaking Muslim Roma in Romania and 12 years of living and working in Turkey in the same field.

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<sup>28</sup> See more about his case on section 5.2.2.3. of this study

My own family's silence and obstruction regarding our Roma background<sup>29</sup> and the struggles and pain to understand the reasons behind helped me to better connect to the people encountered along the way that chose to or were forced to hide their own identity while trying to blend in an unaccepting society. Moreover it helped to understand how invisibility could be both a pattern of exclusion as well as a mechanism of survival for different individuals. I come from a mixed Romanian – Roma family in rural Southeast Romania in which the subject of Roma origins (or the place where my father comes from - "Frumusita Gypsy neighbourhood" [*Rom. tigania din Frumusita*]) has been a taboo or, at times, a topic that brought uncomfortable distress to some of our family members. The fact that my father married a non-Roma and moved away from the badly famed neighbourhood, making extra efforts to prove that he was more hard working (he was a driver) and more honest than the others (Romanians) helped him distance himself from his family's stigma, while the rest of his family who stayed behind could not find many opportunities of escape. As Carter (2010) argues, the status of invisibility – be it voluntary or imposed – comes with a certain social, political and economic implications. Although the negative label put by the non-Roma majority on the community where my father's family lived has been a barrier for inclusion for many of its people, it has been interesting also to follow how the Roma targeted policies started by the Romanian Government in the late 1990s - early 2000s affected them and how they understood and approached these policies. These experiences and insights helped me to project and understand better the realities of the Roma individuals, families, communities and the civil society in Turkey, in the contexts created around them by the social and political changes generated since 2002, which are similar to what happened in Romania in the EU pre-accession period.

Since the time of my undergraduate studies, I started to get involved in the work of Roma civil society and to do research in some of the most marginal Roma communities in Romania – the Turkish speaking Muslim Roma in Southeast Romania. This community was the reason I chose to move to Turkey (in 2002) and

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<sup>29</sup> Presented also in Oprea (2012a), "Roma and Self-representation: Some Aspects of a Roma Activist's Experience", pp.50-62. In Heneghan, John; Moriarty, Mary; and O hAodha, Micheal (Eds), (2012), *Travellers and the Settled Community – A Shared Future*, The Liffey Press, Ireland

do my MA studies<sup>30</sup>, by continuing the research and concrete work on the Roma communities.

My involvement at different levels in the work of the main Roma NGOs in Turkey and international agencies targeting Roma communities<sup>31</sup> constituted an advantage for better access to the targeted stakeholders, for contacting the right respondents for my research, especially on the side of policy makers, but also for observing directly the process of policy design with all dynamics involved. Moreover, from May 2012, for a period of two years, I was a volunteer adviser of the informal network called “Public Administration – Civil Society Dialogue Group for the Roma” which gathered around 30 Roma / Dom / Lom / Abdal NGOs in Turkey and representatives of 6 ministries<sup>32</sup> in monthly meetings held in Ankara (sometimes at the premises of different ministries). The aim of the work of this network was to support the dialogue between the governmental bodies and the Roma civil society, to

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<sup>30</sup> The research for my MA thesis, defended in 2005, focused on a review of the European policies on Roma up to 2003 and their applicability to the case of the Turkish Roma, in the context in which these European policies target the Roma mainly as minority, while Turkey does not recognize them as such. My argument was that if Turkey starts the pre-accession negotiations (which started only in 2005) and the policies on Roma in Europe should apply to Turkey, the Roma in Turkey will not be able to legally benefit from them.

<sup>31</sup> After 4 years of experience in working with the Roma in Romania, I started my work in Turkey in 2002 at the time when there was no Roma civil society organization and I supported the establishment and development of the first Roma NGO in Edirne since 2003. During the 12 years stay in Turkey, I provided capacity building and coaching and helped in fundraising for different Roma NGOs and networks. For years I chaired the Board of ERGO Network - European Roma Grassroots Organisation with the headquarters in Brussels, incorporating among its members some of the NGOs I supported in Turkey. After 2008, I extended my volunteer support to another important Roma NGO in Turkey - Zero Discrimination Association – that works for the rights of all groups of Roma, Dom, Lom and Abdal, together with which I started to collaborate in the Public Administration – Civil Society Dialogue Group for the Roma. During the time of my PhD field work, I wrote and helped this organization and its network of NGOs to start the implementation of a project that was funded by the European Commission and which had as scope the creation of a Legal Aid support structure for the Roma affected by the urban regeneration projects and housing policies in Turkey. Moreover, I was the National Focal Point and one of the trainers of the Turkish Roma mediators, in the framework of the ROMED Programme of the Council of Europe. The information acquired from the field through these channels helped as well my research, preparing the ground for it. Additionally, during my part time PhD study period, I took different consultancy assignments with the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office of the UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund, on Roma health and social determinants of health in Turkey and in the region. In this capacity, I contributed to the work of a Roma Task Force established at the level of the UN. The contacts and the information acquired, as well as the opportunity to do in-depth work on the social determinants of health (of which housing plays an important role), informed also my PhD research (especially on how housing conditions affected people’s health, hence housing being a social determinant of health).

<sup>32</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Ministry of Family and Social Policies, Ministry of Health, Ministry of EU Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Interior, as well as İŞKUR, the Turkish Employment Agency.

ensure better design of Roma-related policies at central and local level, and particularly to support the elaboration of the first Roma Strategy<sup>33</sup> in Turkey.

Working with the Roma in Turkey in general, both as an activist supporting communities and NGOs, but also as a researcher or consultant for international organizations since 2002, gave me the opportunity to know and develop good relations with different Roma groups. Sometimes, through the work I was doing on fundraising for Roma-related projects but also through the interactions during the time spent within many Roma communities, I developed trusting relationships with people that acted as binding agents between myself and the respondents I did not know before and whom I interviewed for this research. Such relationships supported the process of my research, enabled participants to tell their stories in a more relaxed manner and - as Lather (1992) also points out in his theories about conducting research - helped me better understand the presented reality and the position of the people interviewed.

However, in limited occasions the very fact of being known by the Roma NGOs, Roma leaders and public authorities in Turkey, presented some challenges in undertaking some of the interviews. Regardless of my disclaimer that I was asking certain questions and gathering data for my PhD dissertation, I encountered some cases in which my questions were responded to with demands (for project proposal writing, funding, advocacy support or simple individual aid or with unclear or too “politically correct” answers (mainly from the public authorities who did not want to give the “wrong” answers or criticize their institutions, regardless of the fact that I made clear my approach on anonymity of the sources).

Similarly – and this is a challenge that is generally encountered in Turkey in different fields and specifically when referring to human rights or ethnicities – I had to face an over-nationalistic or “protective” attitude of simple individuals or representatives of institutions who refused to provide the slightest critical opinion or negative details about any situation, regardless of the obvious, for fear of putting the country in a negative light in front of “Europe”. For those that did not know me otherwise (as a Roma activist or a representative of international organisations), the bias seemed to come from the fact that I was about to write “something” (a PhD

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<sup>33</sup> Despite its long process of elaboration (due to internal fluctuation of expert staff and decision-making managers in the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, which became the ministry in charge of coordinating the process and issuing the Strategy), the Framework document was officially adopted by the Government only in 2016.

thesis which in many occasions was perceived as writing a piece that could be published and that could appear in the media) for somebody (a university) outside Turkey, in an unclear concept of “Europe” that seems to always criticize the country and its government. For those who had heard of me in relation to topics like “EU funding”, “human rights” etc., the reluctance to be open had to do with concerns over potentially diminishing Turkey’s chances to be seen in a favourable light and continue its process of EU integration. In these situations, I had to use alternate solutions, by repeating the visits and asking alternate questions.

There were also situations on the other extreme in which people would tend to complain and pour criticisms breathlessly, providing confusing answers to my questions, answers which, in some cases, after asking some control questions, turned out to be – understandably - exaggerations. That happened mostly in the cases of the visits in the illegal settlements of tents and shacks in Küçükbakkalköy. Having in mind that visits paid by “outsiders” or authorities are extremely scarce in some of the most excluded settlements or in the sensitive areas in which the houses or improvised shelters of Roma families expect demolitions and eviction, my presence was perceived as a potential opportunity to channel their “message”; an apparently “educated” person from outside who comes to ask questions and takes notes, they reasoned, can only be somebody that comes from “power” / the government and should be able to carry their message.

Nevertheless, when meeting the desperation of some of the poorest Roma in the settlements targeted by my research, the challenge stood within myself as I was overwhelmed sometimes by the degree of human suffering and helplessness that the people I was trying to interview experienced. Regardless of the question asked, people would repeat the same sentences complaining about their condition, pleading for the “humanity” of those “in power”, hoping that their voice will be heard somewhere, by somebody, and that help would “come”.

## **2.5. Research Implications**

Having in mind the lack of in-depth research on the condition and the emerging needs of the Roma in Turkey as well as the degrees of involvement of the main stakeholders in this matter, my research may indirectly answer questions such as: “what do the Roma want in terms of a relation with the Turkish state and

regarding their own development?” and “what would work for them in the given context?”

The issues faced by the Roma started to be debated in the context of Turkey’s response to the EU conditionalities and following the adjustments made to the legal and policy provisions regarding minorities and vulnerable groups in the country. In this context, an informed approach on the particularities of the Roma in Turkey and a thorough understanding of their needs is necessary in order to properly “match them up” with different social inclusion solutions that the Turkish government has been starting to explore.

Therefore, I consider that an informed answer to the main questions of my research would serve both academic debates and policy elaboration purposes on the Roma in Turkey and in Europe. Concretely, the information contained in my dissertation could help the Turkish authorities to design better policies, the European bodies to have a more informed approach and better tailor their intervention and policies for Turkey, and the Roma and non-Roma activists and civil society organizations to better design interventions in the field. Notwithstanding, my hope is that the results of this research will have implications for the field of development studies that address topics related to vulnerable groups, housing and displacement, livelihoods strategies and mechanisms of survival. In the field of Romani studies, this research could bring more light into the life and challenges of the Roma in Turkey, their social and historical itinerary and their positioning within the frameworks of the Turkish society, state policies and the larger Europe’s “Roma issue” and Roma and minority related policies.

### **3. BETWEEN DIVERSITY AND POWER: NEGOTIATING ROMA IDENTITIES**

The chapter is reviewing the context and the form in which the Roma have been addressed by different policies in Europe, especially in the countries that aimed at EU integration, as well as in Turkey up to 2002 when the AKP came into power and started the negotiations with the EU. Moreover, it provides an introduction to the elements that build the response to the first research sub-question, which refers to the impact of the post-2002 governmental policies on the Roma communities in Turkey and which is further developed in the next chapters of this dissertation.

#### **3.1. Benchmarks of Roma Identity Formation and Emancipation in Europe**

##### ***3.1.1. Debated Origins and Historical Shapers of Roma Identity***

The origins of the Roma and their identity formation are still debated by scholars. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, different linguists have attempted to prove similarities between Romanes<sup>34</sup> and Sanskrit<sup>35</sup> and, based on the evolution of different Roma dialects, it is argued by many scholars that the Roma migrated from Northern India between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (Rüdiger 1782:37-84; Courtiade 1989:87-110; Matras 1999:481-502; Hancock 2007). Although the evidence regarding the presence of the Roma on different routes since their emergence from India is said to be often patchy and inconclusive, Romani studies scholars<sup>36</sup> argued that the Roma might have migrated in three major groups, at different times: the group that took the Southern route or stayed in the Middle East is called *Dom*, the group that took the Northern route, towards the Caucasus are the *Lom* and those who went on the Western route, towards Europe are the *Roma*<sup>37</sup>. Accordingly, historical

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<sup>34</sup> Romanes is defined as an Indo-European language, from the Indo-Iranian group, presenting a variety of dialectal fragmentation and preserving elements of languages spoken in Northern India. Romanes is a language that has been influenced by Persian, Armenian, Greek, Slavic languages and Romanian (Sarau 1997), based on the location of those speaking it.

<sup>35</sup> The first account is assumed to date between 1753-1754 when a Hungarian student at Leiden University, Stephan Valyi, “discovered” the roots of the Romani language in Punjabi, comparing 1000 words used by three students from Malabar with Romani words used in Raab, near his city of origins. He later on published these findings in 1763, in Vienna Gazette (Knudsen 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Marcel Courthiade, Yaron Matras, Jan Hancock etc.

<sup>37</sup> The words “Rom” / “Dom” / “Lom” mean “man” (human being) in Romanes, Domari or Lomavren, a common way of people referring to themselves as opposed to outsiders.



accounts mention “the Roma” / Gypsies<sup>38</sup> arriving in Northern Mesopotamia and at the Eastern boundary of the Byzantine Empire towards the end of 10<sup>th</sup> - beginning of 11<sup>th</sup> centuries (Marushiakova & Popov 2001), while the first attestation of the Roma in Europe was indicated in Prizren / Serbia, in 1348 (Patrin 2011). Nevertheless, references to historical sources have been selective and uncritically used, “subjectively driven by the predisposition to support particular narratives” (Marsh 2002:45). In this regard, Fraser signalized the controversies of an obvious trend to assume Roma identity for nomads or other groups which performed some of the occupations encountered among the Roma in Europe: “Too often the assumption has been made, in looking for traces of the Gypsies, that any reference to a migrant group pursuing a Gypsy-like occupation can for that reason be equated with them...” (1992:35). Moreover, one of the supporters of the idea that the Roma emerged from India as a distinct group, Prof. Ian Hancock, has come to recognize that his theories might not have been correct: “Thus in my earliest writing I supported a fifth century exodus from India and accepted the established three-way Rom-Dom-Lom split; I no longer do. (...) I have argued, sometimes strenuously, that our people were one when they left India, one when they arrived in Anatolia, and one when they entered Europe. My findings are leading me more and more to believe that they were not” (Hancock 2006:69). What Hancock sustains further is that the populations addressed today as Roma have been “a composite from the very beginning”, and they were “occupationally rather than ethnically defined”. Moreover, Hancock sustains that the Roma acquired their identity and language much later “in the West” and that they entered in Anatolia and Europe as “a number of smaller migrations“ over “two century span of time” (Hancock 2006:70).

Besides attempting to demonstrate the origins of Roma based on linguistic arguments, more recently, a multi-authored report on “Reconstructing the Population History of European Romani from Genome-wide Data”, published in 2012, highlights the fact that “a genome-wide perspective on Romani origins and population substructure, as well as a detailed reconstruction of their demographic history, has yet to be provided”. The report bases its analysis on genome-wide data from 13 Roma groups collected across Europe and suggested that the European

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<sup>38</sup> Gypsies or people with similar lifestyle and assumed by others as being part of the same group. In Southeast Turkey, there are also some groups (with a more itinerant lifestyle in the past) who are called Gurbeti / Kurbat, Gelsin, Aşık etc. and who are identified as Gypsies, although there is almost no academic knowledge on their origins.

Roma “constitutes a single initial founder population” originating from North / North-Western India approximately 1.5 thousand years ago, spreading in Europe via the Balkans and presenting similar “genetic isolation as well as differential gene flow in time and space with non-Romani Europeans” (CB 2012:1). Lipphardt & Surdu (2014) argues that these scientific attempts to prove Roma racial distinctiveness do nothing but producing “evidence for the reification and stigmatization of those included in the Roma group” (cited in Surdu & Kovacs 2015:10). Notwithstanding, evidence from participative anthropological research on Roma communities in different countries shows that “the issue of origins and ancestry” is generally irrelevant<sup>39</sup> for subjects inquired (Stewart 1997, in Hungary; Gay & Blasco 2001, in Spain, Okely 1983, in the UK; all cited in Surdu & Kovacs 2015:7).

Nonetheless, attempting to demonstrate the origins of the Romani language and hence of the Roma as a distinct people has been considered to be an important step in the reconstruction of Roma history, as “a way of producing identity” (Friedman 1994:118), and of giving the Roma “a history and a legitimacy as a people” (Hancock 2001). However, some authors, such as the Dutch scholars Cottaar, Lucassen and Willems, consider that the common Romani language and origin is an invention that led to the stigmatization process of the Roma in Europe. They also argue that the “Gypsy” (Roma) “label” has been “pragmatically” given to “principally diverse peripatetic groups” (cited in Baar 2011:87) and that the attempt to demonstrate the homogenous representation of the Roma as “Indian diasporic people” is “historically dubious, politically and intellectually counterproductive” (Ibid). In their opinion, this portrayal has isolated the Roma, alienating them from the idea of being a “European minority” and categorized them as “Oriental”, “uncivilized, backward, marginal, criminal, and racially inferior” (Baar 2011:88).

The Roma in Europe have been historically perceived by the societies of the countries they live in as underdeveloped, uncivilized, and altogether non-European. However, some scholarly opinions describe the Roma life-style as “the effect, rather

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<sup>39</sup> During my own research in Turkey over the years (before and during the field work for this study), I found also that the Roma are not necessarily interested in their “origins” and are not aware of other ancestral “place of origin” than Turkey and Greece (for some of those whose parents or grandparents came along with the population exchanges after the establishment of the Republic in 1924). Even in recent times when the Roma started to become a topic of research and discussion for the academia and the press and when the Indian origins started to be known by more people, the Roma in Turkey have little to no affinity towards these “claims”. I argue that this has to do with their strong sense of loyalty for belonging to the Muslim faith and the Turkish citizenship, and therefore with the fact that an Indian origin would distance them from the country they are so devoted to.

than the cause, of how European majorities treated them” (Baar 2011:78). The way authorities and majority populations have related to the Roma throughout Europe has reflected on the trajectory of their self-determination; the constant homogenization, minoritization, marginalization and criminalization of the Roma throughout history has had a great influence on their intellectual and cultural representation (Baar 2011:82). Regarding the criminalization of Roma, Nicolae argues that generally in the countries “where poverty, corruption and totalitarian regimes have been the norm for many centuries, deception and theft proved to be the means of survival for the overwhelming majority of the population”. Therefore, he argues, “to discuss morality and ethics at the social level in most of Eastern Europe without taking this into account is hypocritical” (2013:9).

In comparison with the Roma living in other countries of Europe, the status of the Roma in Turkey can be differentiated to a certain extent, regardless of their similar share of poverty. The different historical trajectory of the Roma in Turkey has shaped their identity formation and makes them seem more integrated, with stronger ties to the state and less discriminated against on the basis of race. Three major turning points and shocks in the trajectory of the Roma in other countries of Europe that have not affected the Roma in Turkey in the same way are the centuries of slavery (on the Romanian territories), the Holocaust, and the Communist and post-Communist period with its transition to the liberal market after the ‘90s. The Roma were forced to work for landlords and monasteries (Asseo 2004:76) as slaves in the Romanian territories for more than 300 years, until slavery was abolished in 1856. During World War II, the Roma in countries like Poland, Hungary, former Czechoslovakia, former Yugoslavia etc. were sent, similarly to the Jews, to concentration camps by the Nazis. The number of Roma and Sinti estimated to have been killed during World War II varies. Some claim that nearly 22,000 Roma died at Auschwitz before the notorious Nazi death camp was liberated on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1945 (Kenety 2012), while the CoE estimates that overall 500 000 Roma and Sinti were massacred by the Third Reich (CoE 2016:7). In the same period, the deportations of the Roma from Romania, the country with the largest Roma population in Europe, to the empty fields of Trans-Dniester (in the former Soviet Union), resulted in thousands more deaths (Achim 2004). Limited compensations have been paid to the victims and their families by some foreign governments and aid organizations. However, the “forgotten Holocaust” of the Roma is not acknowledged in most

historical accounts of these periods. European institutions like CoE and the OSCE urge states to recognize the genocide of the Roma, while Roma activists argue that its lack of recognition is nourishing Anti-Gypsyism throughout Europe (Nicolae 2004).

Furthermore, the Communist period up until the 1990s enforced policies of sedentarization and assimilation which resulted in attempts to eradicate the Romani identity from language, culture, life-style, traditional occupations etc. and further marginalized and obstructed the Roma from adjusting to or coping with the changes of modernity. Moreover, the periods of transition from Communism to liberal democracies in South Eastern Europe further strained the living conditions of the Roma and the relationship with the majority populations, in spite of their official recognition as a minority. Having been seen always as an inferior class and excluded from mainstream society, the Roma were forced to give up their traditional crafts and even their accumulated wealth, both during the 1940s as well as during Communism. They were forcibly sedentarized and lost to a great extent their crafts. In these conditions, the shock of passing from the Communist collectivist market to the open market economy in the 1990s found the Roma unprepared to cope with its challenges. The same shocks were experienced by most of the majority populations of the affected countries. However their level of perpetual exclusion and disempowerment cannot be compared. After the fall of Communism, the confiscated properties were given back to their former owners and people were theoretically able to regain their livelihoods. In Romania, the Roma did not own land or other properties and the confiscated carts with horses could not be given back while the gold taken away from them by Communists was imposed cumbersome rules of retrocession. As a result, the poor became poorer and dependent on state welfare, with major difficulties to redress, since the allocated social welfare only helped individuals to survive but did not give them the instruments to lift themselves out of poverty or to avoid social exclusion.

### 3.1.2. *Venues of Collective Emancipation and Identity Expression*

The process of Roma “emancipation”<sup>40</sup> was considered to be important for the creation of Romani elites, to promote Roma culture and language and to foster communication among the Roma communities and power structures. Some scholars argue that the ability to speak and advertise a group’s mother tongue, and hence ethnic identity, allows people to express a form of cultural agency and to maintain and develop their ethnic minority status (Matras 1999) which can lead to accessing a special set of rights in different countries of Europe.

Although the Roma emancipatory activities remained largely isolated experiments for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the establishment of Roma media channels and publishing laid the basis for the development of a “national” consciousness<sup>41</sup>. By gaining “a voice”, the Roma also started to organize themselves politically in Europe and, in 1933, the first General Union of the Roma was established in Romania, followed by other organisations founded after the World War II and after the Holocaust<sup>42</sup>. All these demarches prepared the ground for the emergence of a “Roma movement” in the 1970s and this constituted a significant effort made towards political representation at international level (CoE 2012d).

The 1<sup>st</sup> World Roma Congress took place in London in 1971, financed by the World Council of Churches and the Indian Government. With this occasion, the symbols that were considered to support the Roma recognition as a nation were adopted: the Romani flag and anthem. Nicolae claims that “only a small minority of the Roma – mostly Roma elites and Roma activists – know or care about the Romani flag”. Further on, he argues that “different Roma communities round Europe are largely ignorant” about the existence of the Roma anthem *Gelem Gelem* (2013:29). In 1990, during the 4<sup>th</sup> *World Roma Congress*, an International Roma Day was

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<sup>40</sup> The term “emancipation” has been also associated with the “liberation” of the Roma from slavery (e.g.: Romania in 1856). Here the term is used in the sense of empowerment, cultural and political advancement.

<sup>41</sup> The first Roma NGO in Bulgaria founded the journal *Istiqbal* [The Future] in 1919. In 1933, the journals “*Neamul Tiganesc*” [The Gypsy Nation] and “*Timpul*” [The Time] were founded in Romania (Ionescu 2002:128). At about the same time, the “*Terbie*” [Education] started to be published in Bulgaria and in 1935, “*Romano Lil*” [Romani Letter] was founded in Yugoslavia (Patrin 2011).

<sup>42</sup> In 1945, a Roma organisation meant to fight against racism was established in Bulgaria and, in 1946, a Roma Assembly was gathered in Poland. The Roma Union in Czechoslovakia was established in 1969, to be banned later on, alongside other Roma associations, by the 1973 communist Government. The World Gypsy Community was founded in 1959, in Paris, by the Romanian Roma Ionel Rotaru, encouraging the Roma, Kale and Manush “to establish relations with Roma in Poland, Canada, Turkey and other countries” (Ibid).

declared for the 8<sup>th</sup> of April. In the same year, at the *International Romani Union* meeting, a standardized system was proposed for the Romani language. This was envisaged to enable the elaboration of written materials and the inclusion of the Romani language in the curricula of different educational establishments<sup>43</sup>.

In 1979, the Roma obtained consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (CoE 2016:22), through the representation of the International Roma Union, although it is unclear what kind of results this presence has brought. Official recognition of the Roma as national minority in the European countries started in 1981, in former Yugoslavia, and followed by other South Eastern European countries only after the collapse of the communism in the 1990s. Starting with 1994, the Roma began to be targeted by the policies of European institutions. In 1995, the Council of Europe (CoE) established the Committee of Experts on Roma and Travellers (MG-S-ROM) with the role of advising member states and authorities on actions targeting the Roma. Additionally, in 2004, the CoE incorporated the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF), which functioned as an NGO but with funding from the CoE and was offered to have its Secretariat in the CoE's premises. This arrangement persisted until 2015 when the CoE decided to limit its "privileges" to the ERTF<sup>44</sup>. However, ERTF was informed that it could continue to be involved in the activities of CoE on Roma, alongside other Roma NGOs, if consultation needed<sup>45</sup>. CoE had Special Representatives for Roma Issues with a related Support Team<sup>46</sup>. The OSCE-ODIHR also created a section dealing with Roma and Sinti Issues and the European Commission has been organising regular Roma Platform, gathering Roma civil society from the EU for consultations on its policies. Moreover, the European institutions and EU countries expressed joint commitment to improve "the social inclusion and integration of Roma" by using all

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<sup>43</sup> Prof. Marcel Courthiade proposed a standardized model of Romani orthography, initiative supported by the European Commission. Despite criticisms, the standardization represented an important benchmark in the official adoption of Romanes as minority language, both at the level of national governments as well as at the EU.

<sup>44</sup> ERTF had a privilege that no other umbrella organisation has experienced. This was done out of the consideration that ERTF would stand as a representative forum for all the different Roma groups in Europe and would help influencing the political agenda of states beyond the EU. However, ERTF has been the target of repeated criticism due to its undemocratic leadership, lack of real representation and no visible advancement brought to the issue.

<sup>45</sup> Upon this decision, CoE has launched a Roma Civil Society Dialogue, aiming at consulting with a broader range of NGOs working in the field across CoE membership area, initiative which has yet to prove its role and effectiveness.

<sup>46</sup> Website <http://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/roma-srsg-support-team> (I have been part of this team myself since 2014).

the relevant instruments and policies available<sup>47</sup>. In this respect, the Conference [later Congress] of Local and Regional Authorities released four relevant Resolutions and one Recommendation between 1981 and 1997. Since 1969, the CoE Parliamentary Assembly issued seven recommendations and three resolutions targeting the social and legal situation of Roma citizens in Europe, the Roma migrants, Roma asylum seekers and returnees to former Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro etc. Similarly, the CoE Council of Ministers released one resolution on the social situation of nomads in Europe (including Roma), one declaration on anti-Gypsyism and raise of racial violence against Roma in Europe, and nine recommendations on education of Roma and Travellers, policies related to Roma, access to healthcare and housing, as well as the movement and encampments of Roma and Travellers<sup>48</sup>.

These provisions demonstrate that, with the enlargement of the EU and the new challenges arising in the European space, the Roma issue became “a European issue”. Improving the Roma minority situation became part of the criteria to be fulfilled by the countries applying for EU membership. In 2005, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution on the Situation of the Roma in the EU, calling upon the European Commission (EC) to “raise the Roma issue to a pan-European level, in particular with candidate countries” (EP 2005). Furthermore, with the aim of addressing the “strong and proportionate measures” that “are still not in place to tackle the deep-rooted problems facing a large proportion of the EU's Roma population”, the European Commission adopted, on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011, a Communication on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies by 2020 (EC 2011b). The Communication requested EU member and candidate countries to submit National Strategies for the Roma by the end of 2011. However, only 15 of the 27 Member States<sup>49</sup> forwarded their strategies to the European Commission; Turkey was not one of them. Although launching its Roma Opening in 2010 and publically announcing specific policies for the Roma, Turkey, which is an EU candidate country, did not commit to the European Commission with a strategic document on Roma. Gradually, after 2011, however, the Turkish Government started to explore (with ministerial experts and Roma NGOs) the possibilities to elaborate

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<sup>47</sup> EU documents on Roma, [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/document/index\\_en.htm#h2-6](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/document/index_en.htm#h2-6)

<sup>48</sup> Roma-related texts adopted by Council of Europe <http://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/roma-related-texts>

<sup>49</sup> France, Romania, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Hungary, the Netherlands, Portugal, Finland, Slovakia, Poland and Malta

such a strategy. Ultimately, after a lengthy and sinuous process, the short version of a framework strategy was made public in 2016, after the EC included it (in 2015) among its pre-conditions for visa liberalisation<sup>50</sup> for Turkey.

## **3.2. Paths of Framing the Roma in Policies in the EU and Candidate Countries**

### ***3.2.1. Conditions Defining the Status of Roma in Europe***

With ancestors that “came from a wide variety of different social and economic backgrounds” (iRSN 2006:15), the Roma live all over Europe and the poorest of them generally live in territorially concentrated vulnerable areas. The countries with the highest number of Roma<sup>51</sup> relative to the total number of the population, are Bulgaria (according to 2011 census – 325,343 and unofficially estimated at 750,000 people), the Czech Republic (between 150,000 and 200,000), Hungary (around 750,000), Romania (officially estimated between 730,000 and 970,000 and unofficially at around 2 million people), and Slovakia (between 440,000 and 500,000). Turkey, however, came to be the country with the largest and most diverse Roma populations, estimates reaching an average of 5 million people.

Presently, the Roma are generally recognized officially by the European states as national minorities or as a group with specific rights<sup>52</sup>. During the era of communism, the rights that were given to Roma in socialist countries depended on the official legal status they had. In Poland, Romania, Hungary, and former Czechoslovakia, for example, the Roma were considered neither a nation nor a nationality; they were part of a social group: “disadvantaged social stratum” in Hungary (HRW 1996:109), part of “other nationalities” in Romania or a “population of Gypsy origin” in Poland. Although they have never been recognized as a minority group in Turkey, the Roma there overwhelmingly distance themselves from emphasis on ethnicity, despite the fact that they have started to recognize their own

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<sup>50</sup> On 16th of December 2013, the visa liberalisation dialogue was launched between the EU and Turkey and the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement was signed.

<sup>51</sup> According to EU Country Factsheets <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma-integration/>

<sup>52</sup> France, for example, does not recognize minorities, therefore the National Strategy that the Government had to develop as a request from the EU is not a strategy as such, but rather an integrated set of policy measures in the framework of country’s mainstream social inclusion policies called: “Priorities for all marginalized populations, including Roma” which addresses also the needs of the Roma and the Gens du Voyage in France (see “French government strategy for Roma integration within the framework of the Communication from the Commission of 5 April 2011 and the Council conclusions of 19 May 2011”, [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma\\_france\\_strategy\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_france_strategy_en.pdf))



identity as Roma more publically since the early 2000s. This distancing comes from the fear that it would place them in the category of (ethnic) “minority” - a sensitive and rather demeaning category, which would not fit into the proud Muslim Turkish nationalistic image that they desire for themselves. Roma, as other disadvantaged groups, activate multiple identities, which are operational under different conditions. This phenomenon is called “strategic ethnicity” and is exploited when there are potential dangers but also potential benefits for the community (positive discrimination, preferential access to services etc.).

The Roma communities all over Europe have been sedentarised and only some families move on a seasonal basis for work-related purposes (i.e.: the traditional families of Kalderash in Romania who travel to sell their products or to collect metal scrap; some poor Dom and Roma families in Turkey who search for seasonal work in agriculture in different parts of Turkey etc.). Specifically during the socialist times, governments took different measures targeting the assimilation and settlement of the Roma: forbidding nomadism, engaging in forced relocation and forced labour, shooting horses, removing wheels from caravans, prohibiting gatherings, confiscating goods and personal valuable belongings etc. Aiming to transfer the Roma to more isolated locations, ghettos were sometimes recreated. Another measure targeting the Roma was that of some governments (e.g.: former Czechoslovakia in the 1970s) who forced the sterilization of Roma women or offered incentives for lowering their birth rate. In Bulgaria, during the 1960s, the government forced the Muslim Roma and the Turkish minority to replace their Muslim names with Slavic ones in an attempt to “Bulgarize” them. Between the 1970s and 1980s, speaking Romani and playing Roma music was banned from public places and wearing of Turkish style traditional clothes was prohibited (Silverman 1989). Similar practices were encountered in Romania - the neighbouring country - in the same period.

Roma have different religions, but generally they adopt the dominant religion of the country they inhabit. More and more, in Europe, however, evangelical churches have succeeded in converting different Roma communities. The predilection towards these churches is related to the humanitarian support conveyed to the impoverished Roma families but also to their openness towards having Roma as pastors and even accepting the performance of sermons in Romanes. The Roma in Turkey, like some of those living in Balkan countries (Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo),

are of Muslim faith. Romania, a country where the Christian Orthodox church is considered a national institution, has a small Turkish-speaking Muslim Roma community living in the Black Sea area. The Muslim Roma are called Horahane Roma, which in Romanes means “Turkish Roma”, “Turkish” implying also a Muslim faith. During the research I conducted in the communities in Babadag in Dobrugea area of Romania, back in 2001, a respondent described their religion as follows: “We are Muslims, so we believe in the God of the Turks” (Grigore & Oprișan 2001:32). In Bulgaria, the “Turkish Roma” sometimes avoid identifying as Roma and are rather supporters of Turkish political parties (strong on the political arena of Bulgaria), opting therefore for other types of politics which distance them from the stigma of the Roma communities and align them with a more powerful nation (Turkish) and political structures.

A research report on the Roma in Turkey briefly identified the stereotypes and common assumptions of the majority population regarding the Roma. These can apply however to all other European countries where the Roma live. According to the report, the Roma are perceived as “living for the moment”, as people only interested in their own pleasure, argumentative, violent and dangerous, petty criminals, “child-stealers”, illiterate and poor by choice, having inherent musical talents etc. (iRSN 2006:11). Despite their heterogeneity, the Roma are perceived to a great extent by majorities as being “a highly homogeneous, depersonalized mass, whose members collectively can be characterized by illiteracy, lack of work discipline, and lack of respect for legal and social norms” (Csepeli & Simon 2004:133). One other criticism that Roma receive from national and international bodies, which are supposed to design policies for their inclusion, is that the Roma are not united and that they should have “one voice” in order to better represent their interests. Acknowledging the vast diversity among the different groups of Roma, Nicolae argues that Roma unity is a myth since Roma “have interests that do not coincide and conflicts among them are not uncommon” and that “there is no way in which the Roma could ever be united” (2013:11).

The Roma living in the countries of the European Union are EU citizens and have the same rights as all other citizens, including that of free movement across borders of Member States. Although having the right to travel after the enlargement of the EU with several Central and Eastern European countries in 2004 and 2007, the migration of Roma towards Western Europe has been triggering discrimination and

nationalist responses. Many Roma from Bulgaria and Romania (countries where Roma are the second largest minority) go, in search for a better living, to France, Spain or Italy because language barriers there are lower than for other countries. There, the poor Roma of Eastern Europe join the settlements and camps inhabited by Roma from other countries and explore different niches of survival through street commerce, begging, performing daily jobs etc. The Roma camps in Italy as well as the temporary settlements in France have been for a long time in the eye of the authorities and of the mass media (through repeated camp demolitions, evictions or expulsions / repatriations), constituting an issue to which no viable solution has been found as yet. Some different, more inclusive, approaches to migration of poor citizens have been employed by Germany or Ireland, which also host Roma from different Eastern European countries. The immigrants – Roma included - are offered here more chances to get integrated and represent less of a problem than in the countries where policies are oriented towards isolating or banning them. Notwithstanding, as long as the situation in the countries of origin continues to be economically precarious and the Roma to be discriminated, they will continue to migrate to other countries for better conditions and opportunities.

Contemporary history shows that the Roma are being returned to an even further marginalized status of false nomadism, being encamped and chased away from one place to another, while moving from Eastern to Western European countries. For example, in Italy, the Roma who started to migrate from South Eastern Europe for different reasons, are being located in “temporary” camps in the major Italian cities, spaces that are subject to major stigma, setting Roma automatically under a “nomadic” identity that presumes a culture of travelling and being unaccustomed to a sedentary lifestyle. Sigona argues that these policies based on concepts of nomadism are legitimizing policies of segregation and forcing the Roma to have “a certain culture”, they further the idea that the “Roma are not Italians and do not ‘belong’ to Italy” (2005:747). There are Roma camps in different Italian cities and they provide refuge for around 40,000 people with minimal social and legal rights, coming from South Eastern Europe and Balkans. The Roma immigrants in Italy outnumber the three main Italian Roma groups, which are the Roma, Sinti and Camminanti (at their turn, very diverse, divided into subgroups according to their region or occupation) (Viaggio 1997) and are estimated at around 150,000 people.

In addition to the negative sentiments of the majority societies in Europe regarding the Roma immigrants, it is argued that the growing nationalist voices in Europe and threats of extreme-right groups (like in Hungary and Czech Republic) bring to light the “inefficiency of the human rights discourse” in connection to Roma issues and “the misconception of non-Roma who perceived Roma” as a “privileged and over-supported minority” (UNDP 2012b:10). Centuries of stereotyping have given rise to individual and group violence. Notorious violent events and racist statements have been recorded in different countries and politicians use the Roma as scapegoats in the public arena. One example of demeaning political discourse that gives the tone of the way in which the Roma are treated in the country is the speech of the founding member of Hungary’s ruling Fidesz party, Zsolt Bayer, who stated that “Most Gypsies are not suitable for cohabitation. They are not suitable for being among people. Most are animals, and behave like animals. They shouldn't be tolerated or understood, but stamped out. Animals should not exist. In no way” (WJC 2013).

Discrimination, poverty and low political participation of the Roma remain important obstacles that are not as yet successfully addressed by the policies in the EU and non-EU member states. Although there are countries where Roma are represented in the lines of political parties, in national Parliaments or the European Parliament<sup>53</sup>, their presence is rather insignificant in comparison with the Roma population and the magnitude of the issues the Roma face. Romania has a Roma Party (which has been under multiple accusations of corruption) and a seat in the Parliament, as well as a few Roma in the mainstream political parties. In Hungary, the Roma Self-Government is also a controversial association, under scrutiny for fraud and contested by Roma communities as well. One of the countries with more positive examples of Roma participation is Macedonia. The Roma there have two political parties, with seats in the Parliament and a minister without portfolio in the Government. Nevertheless, the marginalisation and exclusion of Roma communities have prevented the emergence of an upper class / elite, one that can take on the role

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<sup>53</sup> In 1994, Juan de Dios Ramírez-Heredia, Roma from Spain, became the first Roma member of the European Parliament, after being the first Roma member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe between 1983 and 1985. In 2008, two Hungarian Roma women were elected in the European Parliament: Livia Járóka and Viktória Mohácsi. Jaroka was re-elected one more term. In 2014, two other Roma were elected to the European Parliament. One from Sweden - Soraya Post, and one from Romania – well-known musician Damian Draghici, former adviser to the Romanian President and senator.

of leadership similar to other communities.

### ***3.2.2. Impact of the "Roma Singling-Out" Policies***

All relevant European bodies have been acknowledging the alarming situation of the Roma, and the rampant discrimination and racism that has been historically directed against them. Progress on Roma inclusion has been challenged by raising waves of migration of Roma from Southeast Europe to the Western European countries. An increasing number of ghetto-like settlements host more and more Roma who left their homes for more opportunities and a better life and local and national authorities are entirely equipped to deal with the challenges this situation entails.

Regardless of targeted policies and funding allocated by European institutions to improve the situation of the Roma, it has become evident that consistent change has not occurred and that the states disregard or simply do not take efficient steps towards improving the living conditions and the rampant discrimination against the Roma. Nicolae argues that, despite all attempts for social inclusion, the "Roma continue to be the most hated ethnic group in Europe despite the fact that over the past two decades, everyone has acknowledged their need for inclusion. Approaches up until now have been rushed, cheap and mainly for show, as they were based on electoral logic, designed to please the majority populations" (2012b).

The European policies targeting the Roma and their translation at national levels have proved to be rather inefficient after more than 20 years of implementation. A World Bank report exploring the economic arguments of Roma inclusion argued that "more political attention in recent years has not yet translated into notable improvements in the day-to-day lives of most Roma" (2010:6). Moreover, Nicolae considers that these policies, "designed to lead to social inclusion are incoherent and result in an acceleration of social exclusion and a dangerous polarization of majority and Roma communities" (2012a). The CoE Commissioner for Human Rights has acknowledged that, in times of economic distress, the Roma singled out by these policies have become the target of "anti-Gypsyism (...) widespread throughout Europe" (CoE 2012b). Some argue that ethnicity or race should be removed from "law and politics" altogether (Powell 2000:142), as focus on ethnicity can be as detrimental as it can be beneficial. Since it involves "social differentiation and social recognition", it can also lead to discrimination (Castells

2004:56), both situations masking racism and “actively” supporting it (Powell 2000:143).

The economic crisis that affected the European space since 2008, alongside the EU-supported Roma targeted policies, brought about waves of animosity from the side of majority populations. Situating themselves at a higher, more deserving rank, these majority populations perceived the targeted policies and funding for the Roma as detrimental to the economic situation of taxpayers. In their view, the “unintegrated” Roma continued to be “undeserving” recipients of benefits and special funding, while the rest of the society had to face and pay for the challenges of the economic crisis. Moreover this became subject of populist parties’ instruments to instigate even further hate against the Roma. In the context in which majority populations had to face certain austerity measures, welfare for the Roma specifically worsened the social environment around the Roma communities. Although generally the Roma are used as electoral capital, there are cases in which implementing policies for the Roma can bring about greater negative sentiments of the majority and ultimately lose votes for some well-intentioned politicians that are more favourable to Roma interests. In the recent times, “the Roma ‘threat’ is manipulated and used” by Eurosceptics to advance arguments “against the overall EU project” (Sigona 2014). The special attention given to the Roma by the EU who calls on national governments for action has triggered a paradoxical effect: “the new tendency to single out Roma as a European priority and a special European concern has (...) opened up new opportunities for nationalist politicians to plead against new national measures against Roma. By doing so, it is therefore understood that politicians try to “minimise or evade” the responsibility of their governments and instead pass the responsibility to the EU, symbolically excluding the Roma from their own “national space and frame” (Vermeersch 2012:3).

In the case of Turkey, despite the legal status of the Roma as being part of the majority population and the general official non-recognition of other ethnicities, a paradoxical situation occurred with the occasion of the Roma Opening in 2010. The Turkish Prime Minister at the time gathered members of Roma civil society, promised improvement of their situation and directed state ministries to work on policies that would benefit them. The Roma in Turkey never stood as a united front before on the public agenda with any demand. The reasons behind this have to do with lack of group awareness, no culture of civic mobilization, group fragmentation

and stigma. Especially the latter made difficult a reaction against authority having in mind the persistent feeling of the Roma to being treated as second class citizens and the consequential desire to be seen as equal and part of the dominant society. In comparison with other ethnic or religious groups in Turkey that are not recognized as minorities (e.g.: the Kurds or the Alevi population), the Roma are not known for protesting or for publically coming against the state authorities, regardless of their poor social conditions. By using the Roma, as a less demanding group, to initiate ethnic-based policies, the Government might have attempted to open a sort of “Pandora’s box” and try to make a shift in challenging the normative perceptions of ethnicities and alterity in Turkey. However, the discourse of the “Opening” can be characterized from many points of view as populist since it treats the policies promised to Roma as “gifts” to an ethnic group which does not hesitate to show gratitude to and brings no criticism against the Government, as opposed to other minorities in Turkey. This situation confirms the arguments according to which “democracies are prone to populist upbringings, especially when inequality is on the rise” (DeLong 2016).

Consequently, the promised policies (e.g. housing during the Roma Opening) faced difficulties in being materialized properly to fit the needs of the Roma communities in Turkey, while the structural and legal barriers for implementing (ethnic) group-targeted policies had yet to be lifted (ZDA 2012). As a result, to avoid being singled out as a distinct ethnic group, the Roma have been addressed under the categories of “disadvantaged” or “vulnerable” groups. Despite this rather indirect treatment, disagreement has risen among some state officials and bureaucrats who saw the recognition of the “Roma issue” in Turkey not applicable and its appearance only prone to appease pro-Europe actors.

### ***3.2.3. Inclusive Citizenship vs. Excluding Regulations in Turkey***

The republican concept of citizenship applied in Turkey does not favour the idea of diversity, this being considered detrimental to national unity and social cohesion (Baban 2005:52) and therefore a potential vulnerability of the state. Consequently, the Turkish governments have been acting as if “clashes could easily emerge (...) if arguments for the rights of difference become exaggerated” (Kaya 2004:152). Subsequently, the establishment of a “uniform” republican notion of citizenship, since its definition as part of the Turkish Citizenship Law of 1924,

aborted the possibility for autonomous manifestations (Kandiyoti 1991:43). Therefore, consolidation of the Turkish state and its nation-building process implied “various forms of encroachment upon subnational entities based on ethnic, religious, and tribal affiliations and their incorporation into the nation-state as the primary locus of loyalty and allegiance” (Kandiyoti 2001:54).

In “the shift from a multi-ethnic (Ottoman) empire to an Anatolia-based nation state”, after 1923, measures were taken to heighten Turkey’s “Turkish” national consciousness (Kandiyoti 1991:4). While trying to create equal conditions of citizenship, the difference between being a citizen of Turkey and being a Turk were overlooked and ignored altogether, regardless of the numerous ethnic groups that live in Turkey besides the Turks. This concept disregarded different ethnicities and divided the minorities from the majority as non-Muslims vs. Muslims. This neglect produced assimilative policies and ultimately raised important minority questions even as it tried to prevent them from forming (Kuzu 2010:40). Therefore, regardless of the equality to all citizens stated by law, “even in the structure and policies of the state, (...) the older idea that Muslim equals Turk and non-Muslim equals non-Turk persisted” (Lewis 2002:356-357). Eissenstat argues in this sense that the “success” of the Turkish nationalism was based largely on its “ability to overlap a pre-existing and deeply felt Islamic identity” (2005:246). Moreover, it is argued that while there are claims that the Turkish universal citizenship is a unique model in the Middle Eastern context for its “inclusionary” dimension, the other ethnic Muslim groups have “always had the door of assimilation open to them” (Eissenstat 2005:252). The Roma groups blended to a great extent their cultural patterns into the Turkish Anatolian “culture” and have not expressed, so far, claims of minority status.

The first law on citizenship in Turkey was adopted by the Turkish Parliament in 1928. It stipulated that the nationals of the Republic are citizens and they are to be called Turks (Insel 1999:149). Since non-Muslim minorities were particularly classified through the Lausanne Treaty, all other Muslim citizens in Turkey were given Turkish national identity. This “inclusive” ruling excluded therefore the manifestation of ethnic or religious particularities in the public sphere. Even before the adoption of the Citizenship Law, the Law on the Status of Public Servants of 1926 [Tr. *Kamu Yasası*] had as a first condition for accessing a public administration job the fact of “being Turk” and not having Turkish citizenship. Even though the text of this law was modified in 1965, it is still claimed by different activists that there is



an informal limitation for the members of minorities and other non-Turkish groups to access high public service positions, including entering military schools (Aksu 2003:152). The Roma have internalized these provisions and practices and fatalistically tend to believe that they “have no chance to evolve on the social ladder” due to this situation<sup>54</sup>. Testimonies of the Roma from different parts of the country recall the effects of systemic and institutionalized discrimination:

The state wanted to suppress the *Romanlık* (being a Roma)...and in order to make others accept us, we started to negate<sup>55</sup> our Roma origin”<sup>56</sup>.

The rejection or hiding Roma identity can be also explained through the stigma enforced by the amount of derogatory synonyms the *Gypsy* [Tr. *Çingene*] word has in the Turkish dictionaries<sup>57</sup> and books. A Roma activist<sup>58</sup> in Ankara made different official complaints against this practice and, as a result, the Ministry of Education issued a Circular<sup>59</sup> calling for the withdrawing of the pejorative expression from the dictionaries they published (EC 2001:30-31). This provision applied to the new editions of these particular publications, but the former editions remained in circulation. Similar definitions remain in the books edited by private publishers. Nevertheless, stereotypes concerning low-status groups often become shared across group boundaries so that they eventually accept them as self-stereotypes (Crocker et al. 1998:510) and these disempowered groups, as the Roma are, “build a collective identity around them” (Simon 2004:107).

Moreover, the Roma in Turkey have been mentioned expressly in some legal regulatory documents, like the *Law No 5683 on the Movement and Residence of Aliens in Turkey* (TC 1950b), which, in Article 21, mentioned the expulsion of “Gypsies” and “nomads who are not linked to the Turkish culture”. The 2011 ECRI Report on Turkey criticized this law and expressed concerns about the fact that this

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<sup>54</sup> From a 2003 interview with Hasan, the owner of a kahvehane in Tophane / Istanbul, for the *Report on the Roma in Turkey* I prepared for the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC)

<sup>55</sup> Journalist Nazım Alpman noted in an article that “They do not express themselves as Gypsies; they don’t want that. And they found a way to escape it (...). They live their culture among themselves” (1996:30).

<sup>56</sup> A.Ç. (49 years old), 31.05.2004, during one community visit in Edirne / Turkey

<sup>57</sup> Sanctions were applied for the following books: *Turkish Proverbs and Sayings*, *Great Encyclopaedic Dictionary with Images*, *Okyanus Encyclopaedic Dictionary*, *Great Larousse Dictionary and Encyclopaedia*, *Yeni Cumhuriyet Encyclopaedia*. The definitions of *Çingene* (Gypsy) contained the following: “stingy”, “shameless person”, “a community composed of people with dark skin and a nomad life-style”, “they move from a place to another and are accused of stilling children and eating human flesh” etc.

<sup>58</sup> Initiatives of Mustafa Aksu, mentioned also in his book *Türkiye’de Çingene Olmak* (Aksu 2003)

<sup>59</sup> Circular of 5.10.2001, published in the Official Gazette on the 13.07.2011.

“may create particular difficulties for Roma who do not have official identity documents” (US 2009). On January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Bülent Arınç, State Minister and Deputy Prime Minister at the time placed a motion on the agenda of the Parliament for eliminating the prejudicial terms from this Law. He qualified this action as a “symbolic, psychological essay” of relieving the Roma from discrimination (BA 2011). Another similar document is the *Ordinance on the Discipline Rules of the Police and the Activities to be Developed in the Police Offices*. Chapter 5(B), Administrative Provisions, Paragraph 9, mentions among others, the categories of suspicious people: “5) The Gypsies who have no specific job; 6) The unemployed and those who wander purposeless, not because they do not find a job, but because they do not want to work” (TC 2012). Similarly, an *Ordinance of the Ministry of Interior* of 2003<sup>60</sup> referred to measures to be taken when someone applies for citizenship. The document mentioned the necessity of special attention and research on people who might be “beggars” or “Gypsies” (Çakır 2003:1,8). The most debated legal document that discriminates against the Roma was the *Settlement Law* of 1934 [*İskan Kanunu*], which treated them alongside “those that are not linked to the Turkish culture”, “the anarchists” and “the spies”. The Law, which was modified in 2006<sup>61</sup>, stipulated that the “nomads and itinerant Gypsies are not to be settled in the country” and “shall not be accepted as immigrants in Turkey”<sup>62</sup>. After modification, the new version of this Law includes only the word “nomad”, without specifically naming the Roma (TC 2006). All these legal documents mentioning specifically the Roma show that they have not been treated equally under the law, although as citizens of the country and part of the majority population they should have been so. Consequently, numerous Roma have been considering that they are perceived as “intruders” or simply treated as “non-existent” and that “being a Gypsy is a good pretext for the police to stop you every time something bad has happened around”

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<sup>60</sup> Letter no B050NÜVI060000-006-2002-782-700/13848 was sent by the Ministry of Interior to the Directions for Provinces Population and Citizenship on 23.10.2003. Its existence was denied after journalists and lawyers enquired about it. The document did exist, however, fact proved by an official reaction to it by the MP Sedat Pekel who sent the letter no 845/10.12.2003 about it to the Ministry of Interior (Turkish Parliament registration 6/869-3916) (Oprışan 2005b).

<sup>61</sup> The Article 48 of the Settlement Law no 5543 has been modified, as per the Official Gazette issue no 26301 of 26/09/2006.

<sup>62</sup> Text of the Law before amendment: “Chapter on Areas of settlement, Article 1: The emigrants and refugees, nomads and itinerant Gypsies are not to be settled in the country; (...) Article 4-A: The ones not faithful to the Turkish culture, B: The anarchists; C: The spies; D: The nomad Gypsies; E: The ones who were excluded from their motherland, that are not to be accepted to Turkey as immigrants. Section II Article 9: The nomads and the itinerant Gypsies are to be settled in the appropriate places decided by the Ministry of Health and Social Assistance”.

(Oprışan 2003d). The EU continued to criticize Turkey for these reasons in its regular progress reports. The 2010 EU Progress Report on Turkey emphasized that: "...in the absence of a comprehensive policy to address the situation of Roma, the latter still face social exclusion and marginalisation in access to education, discrimination in health services, exclusion from job opportunities, difficulties in gaining access to personal documentation and exclusion from participation in public affairs and public life (EC 2010a:34).

#### ***3.2.4. Difference of Status – Similarity of Condition***

On a more declarative manner, in 2000, during the 5<sup>th</sup> World Roma Congress, the Roma were proclaimed a "non-territorial nation" (RNC 2012), in addition to being described as "transnational minority" (McGarry 2010) or "European minority" (CoE 1993; Liegeois & Gheorge 1995; Bonova, Swoboda & Wiersma 2011; EP 2007; EP 2000; EP 2006a). Especially the CoE, in its *Resolution 1203*, has described the Roma as a "true European minority", justifying therefore trans-European governance. However, Vermeersch argues that by "promoting this particular identity frame", the CoE has "unintentionally" supported "the nationalisms that have pushed the Roma out of the other national communities in Europe" (2012:8).

The EU integration process has brought along targeted policies and affirmative action for the Roma in the candidate states. However, although the EU compels the candidate states to take necessary measures for minority protection, including the Roma, it does not specify particular institutional frameworks for the application of such measures. In this regard, Sigona (2014) argued that the Roma "are a testing ground and an opportunity for the EU political project", lacking however "adequate institutional representation".

In what concerns the Roma in Turkey, the EU rules and regulations regarding the protection of minorities do not particularly apply from a legal point of view since they do not have this status in Turkey, being legally "blended" into the majority population. However, the EU has insisted on the need for recognition of their fragile status and for protection of their rights in Turkey (as it insisted upon the protection of the rights of the Kurds etc.), asking for practical steps towards their social inclusion.

In spite of the "Europeanization of minority rights in Turkey", through the reforms imposed by the EU which allowed for the recognition of certain cultural and

linguistic rights of the minorities<sup>63</sup>, Kızılkın-Kısacık argued that because of “implementation problems and bureaucratic resistance”, “the real conditions of the minorities in Turkey have not undergone drastic changes” (2011:2). Moreover, such reforms have induced strong opposition from the dominant society and “lead to a rise in extreme nationalism” and potentially “an ever increasing disintegration between minority and majority groups” (Ibid). This, however, refers mostly to the reforms and the reactions towards the Kurdish (distinct ethnic group but not legally recognized minority in Turkey) or the Armenians (recognized as minority population under the non-Muslim category). The extent of negative reactions of the majority against the Roma cannot be yet estimated, although some cases of ethnically targeted violence and hate speech have been recorded by NGOs such as Zero Discrimination Association in Turkey or the European Roma Rights Centre - a European rights-based organization (e.g.: Selendi conflict in 2010<sup>64</sup>, Denizli in 2014<sup>65</sup> etc.). While it can be observed that in Europe, the anti-Gypsyism<sup>66</sup> has grown in parallel with the Roma targeted policies, after the Roma Opening in 2010, some Roma activists in Turkey started to fear that policies and projects addressing specifically the Roma might have been the trigger of some of the ethnic hatred manifestations mentioned above.

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<sup>63</sup> Since the Helsinki Summit in 1999, Turkey started to initiate several reforms on cultural and minority rights. For example, the Law (amending several laws) No: 4771 of 3 August 2002 allows for broadcasting and opening of private courses for “teaching different languages and dialects used traditionally by Turkish citizens in their daily lives”, with the condition that “such broadcasts do not contradict with the fundamental principles of the Turkish Republic as enshrined in the Constitution or with the indivisible integrity of the state with its territory and nation” (Kızılkın-Kısacık 2011:7).

<sup>64</sup> On the 10th of January 2010, a conflict escalated between the Roma and a group of non-Roma in Selendi district (province of Manisa in the West of Turkey) after a contradictory discussion between a Roma and a non-Roma over smoking in an establishment. The conflict grew in proportions and after 5 days of fighting, the Governor decided to relocate the Roma families in another place called Salihli, since their houses and cars have been damaged and their lives were under threat. The trial with multiple accused and victims continued for 5 years in another location, again, due to safety concerns. Certain deliberations on the case still continue to day.

<sup>65</sup> On the 4th of January 2015, one 10 years old mentally challenged Roma boy was shot nine times in the chest by a non-Roma workshop owner. The tragic event escalated with a mass attack by groups of people who attacked the houses of the Roma. An individual crime has escalated in an ethnic conflict that made the headlines of the news channels in Turkey.

<sup>66</sup> According to CoE, “...antigypsyism refers to a specific form of racism: racism against people from Roma communities. It is very similar both in meaning, and in terms of its impact, to Romaphobia, which describes fear, dislike or hatred of Roma people. (...) Antigypsyism [is] a term indicating the specific expression of biases, prejudices and stereotypes that motivate the everyday behaviour of many members of majority groups towards the members of Roma and Traveller communities...” (2015:30)

### 3.3. Specificity of the Roma in Turkey

#### 3.3.1. Groups Diversity and Interrelation

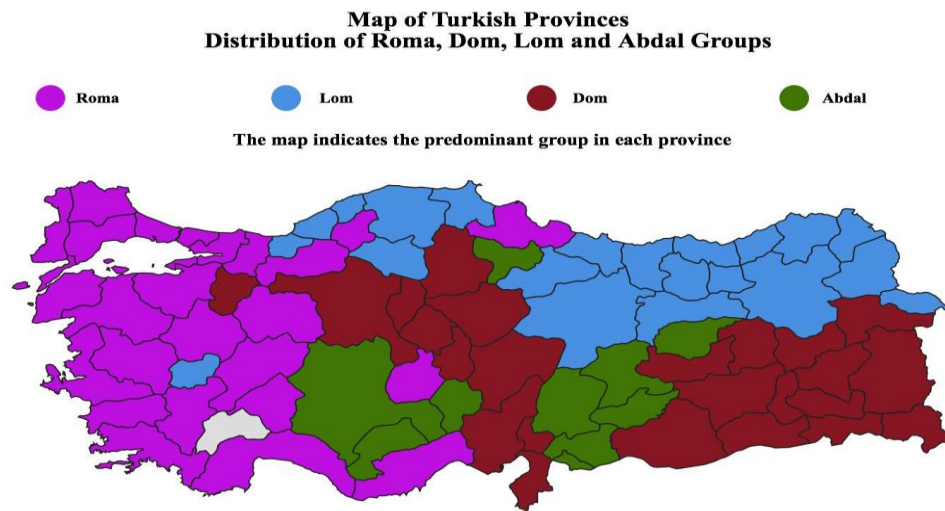
Turkey is the only country that accommodates all three main Roma groups - the Rom, the Dom and the Lom – argued as having the same origins. However, frequently, in Turkey, these groups avoid identifying themselves ethnically, due to fear of discrimination. Moreover, they tend to acculturate to mainstream Turkish (in different parts of Turkey) or Kurdish (in Southeast Turkey) cultures, in an attempt to diffuse their identity into that of the majority population of the area they inhabit. Moreover, until very recently, when policy and scholarly discourses started to address them, these groups did not manifest any interest in joint collective action. Besides fear of being discriminated against and persecuted, this could be explained by their general lack of collective self-awareness, lack of connection with each other, geographical distance and affiliation with different Muslim rites (Shafi, Hanefi, and Alevi - Bektaşî).

The following map shows the distribution of the main groups – Roma, Dom, Lom and Abdal, by provinces, based on their estimated preponderance. Many provinces (both in urban and rural areas) have presence of different groups; the map highlights however the most numerous / dominant group<sup>67</sup>. Since data on ethnicity cannot be legally collected and many groups identify themselves at different times with different names, the estimations have been made based on years of field research and consultation with Roma leaders. A particular source for the verification of these estimations was Elmas Arus, the Roma-Abdal leader and documentarist who

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<sup>67</sup> For example: Istanbul has both Roma and Abdal population but the Roma are majority; Bursa has Roma, Lom (Posha), Abdal and Dom; Adana – Dom and Roma; Izmir – Roma and Abdal in the villages; Uşak – Lom and Abdal; Antalya – Abdal / Tahtacı and Roma; Karaman – Abdal and Roma; Yozgat – Abdal and Roma; Hatay – Dom and Abdal; Kahraman Marai – Dom (a Dom group who calls itself “Melikli”) and Abdal; Malatya – Dom of “Melikli sülalesi” [Melikli lineage]; Adıyaman – Dom Karaçi; Elazığ – Dom and Abdal; Tunceli – Alevi Dom; Kayseri – Abdal and Roma who are called “Mandacılar” [buffalo handlers] who are said to have arrived in the region around 1960s from Bulgaria by carts dragged by buffalos; Çankırı – Lom Elekçi [sieve makers]; Kütahya – Roma and some Lom families; Eskişehir – Roma and Abdal; Ankara – Abdal (mostly in villages), Roma and Dom; Zonguldak – Lom and Roma; Samsun – Roma and Abdal; Ordu – Lom and Roma; Sivas – Lom / Poshia (who do not want to be publically called as such by saying that “biz Poşalıktan çıktık” [We got out of Poshia identity]); Düzce – Abdal Elekçi; Erzincan – Lom and Abdal; Erzurum – Lom and Şih Bızınlı (a group which is identified by others as Çingene [Gypsy] but seems very different than the other Roma groups); Bitlis – nomadic Dom; Van – Dom / Mırtıp; Osmaniye – Dom and Abdal. No data has been identified for Burdur (Data confirmed with Elmas Arus in December 2016 interview and based on her findings for the *Buçuk* documentary of 2007)

covered 38 provinces to gather testimonies<sup>68</sup> for her “Buçuk” [The Half] documentary on the Roma in Turkey.



The Roma groups – “European Roma” (living mainly in the Marmara and Thrace regions in Turkey) have to a large extent lost their mother tongue. They speak mainly Turkish and have acculturated to the Turkish culture. The Dom groups, living in the Southeast Turkey, in an already less developed region due to the on-going conflict between the Turkish army and the Kurdish guerrilla, took longer period of adjustment to the sedentary life and acculturated to the Kurdish culture. The Dom are also identified with the following appellations, the etymology of some not being determined<sup>69</sup>: *Cono* (from the Romani word *djene* which means “people”), *Aşık* (archaic name given to itinerant rural musicians in Southeast Turkey), *Çuki* (appellation encountered also in Iran for the Roma / nomads / marginal groups), *Gawandi* (from the Kurdish *gawand* which means cattle shepherd which also determined the Kurdish word *gundi* for “unpolished peasant”; otherwise, the closest word in Arabic for this is *gawad* meaning “proxenetism”), *Ghorbati* (word of Arabic origin used in the entire Middle Eastern area to identify the nomads / those that come

<sup>68</sup> The material for the documentary, for which I was an academic advisor towards the last stages of production, was collected during multiple years of field research by Elmas Arus. The information is archived in form of video files and field notes. My own data on these specific groups and their geographical location was confirmed by checking the archived documentary material together with Elmas Arus, in full knowledge and agreement for the purposes of this thesis.

<sup>69</sup> Exact translations of some of these appellations need to be verified through the Kurdish, Arabic or Armenian languages which have been spoken in the Southeast area of Turkey.

from elsewhere / the Gypsies; transferred to Turkish *gurbet*, it designates those estranged who left the country to leave abroad), *Mutrib* / *Mırtıp* (Arabic for “fiddler” / “musician”), *Kereçi* / *Qaraçi* (from the Arabic “*khārijīyy*” designating those who “left” / “got out”, who chose to live outside the rules of the society) and *Gelsin* (appellation for Roma in the area of Diyarbakır before the ‘90s with unclear origin, although the word in Turkish means “may [they] come”) (Oprişan 2005a). The Lom (living in Northern Turkey and the Black Sea region) also identified as *Posha* / *Bosha*<sup>70</sup> (also in Andrews 1992:194) are the only group whose members live generally dispersed among the other layers of the society of their region, not necessarily clustered as a group in specific neighbourhoods. They hide their ethnic identity and manage to blend into the society more than the other two groups. This might be the reason for which they are considered to be the “best integrated” and reports show that their education level is the highest among all “Roma” groups in Turkey (ZDA 2012). Additionally, there are the Abdal or otherwise called *Teber*, *Tahtaci* etc. who are identified by others as *Çingene* [Gypsy] and have similar lifestyle and relation with alterity as the Roma.

The Roma are also identified with ethnonyms reflecting their traditional occupations: *elekçi* [sieve makers], *sepetçi* [basket makers], *kalaycı* [tinsmiths], *demirci* [blacksmiths], *arabacı* [wagoner], *çiçekçi* [flower seller] etc. Many of these ethnonyms are locally or regionally used in Turkey as well as in the neighbouring countries. Some are used only by group members and others - only by outsiders, in a pejorative manner (Svanberg 1989). The rich archives of the Ottoman government and local administration acknowledged the Roma under the names of *Kıbtı*, *Chingene*, *Chingane*, *Chigan*<sup>71</sup>, and provided information about their status<sup>72</sup>. According to these sources, the Ottoman Empire allegedly applied a differential treatment to Muslim and Christian Roma, the Christians paying a higher tax than the Muslim Roma<sup>73</sup>. For purposes of control and regular collection of taxes, the

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Çoban Dede, the Çeribaşa in Gültepe / Kağıthane, 2002, Field Notes Istanbul

<sup>71</sup> The Roma were first mentioned in documents of the Ottoman Empire in 1430, when the Register of Timars for the Nikopol Sanjak [region] recorded 431 Roma households, 3.5% of the total population listed (Marushiakova & Popov 2001:27).

<sup>72</sup> The Roma participated also in the Ottoman army’s invasions in the Balkans. The archives mention the “Gypsy Sanjak” [*Çingene Sancağı*] or *Liva-i Kıbtıyan*, with its Law on the leader of the Gypsy Sanjak (1541). The term *sanjak* was used in the sense of an auxiliary group to the army and not of a territorial unit (Marushiakova & Popov 2001).

<sup>73</sup> Authors of the time contradict each other on this subject (i.e. Paspatis, Boue, Cantemir). Ottoman records mention Roma as “people without religion” [*dinsiz*] and the 1945 Census records under this

sedentarization of nomads was a practice used by Ottoman authorities.<sup>74</sup> The Christian Roma were usually nomadic (*gezende*) and the mixture of the Muslim and non-Muslim groups was prohibited by law. The Law concerning the Gypsies in the Province of Rumelia [*Kanunname-i Kibtiyan-i vilayet-i Rumili*], issued in 1530 by Sultan Suleiman I the Magnificent, mentions the fact that “(1) The Muslim Gypsies from Stamboul, Edirne and elsewhere in Rumelia pay 22 *akche* for each household and each unmarried person. The infidel (Christian) Gypsies pay 25 *akche*, and, as for the widows, they pay 1 *akche* tax. (...) (7) If Muslim Gypsies begin to travel with non-Muslim Gypsies, live with them and mix with them, they should be admonished; after being punished, the infidel Gypsies should pay their taxes as usual. (8) Those Gypsies who are in the possession of an authorization from the Sultan are to pay only the Sultan’s tax [*harach-i padishahi*] and do not pay land tax...and the other usual taxes” (Marushiakova & Popov 2001:32).

Generally not being considered a serious “threat” by the power holders, passing in a rather romanticized manner through the accounts of the travellers and novelists, “benefitting” from the religious membership which included them in the “*millet-i hakime*”, the “believers” or the Muslims, as opposed to the “*millet-i mahkume*”, the non-Muslims or the minorities (Çetin 2002:72-73), the Roma groups in Turkey have enjoyed a certain amount of tolerance that other societies or political systems in Europe have not provided for them in the same period.

### 3.3.2. *From Stigmatization to a Sense of Belonging*

After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the Roma enjoyed, in theory, mainstream citizenship rights. However, authorities allegedly had a practice through which they attempted to differentiate the Roma from the rest of the majority population. In this sense, although it is not clear if it was a general practice applied to all Roma in the country, there are sample documents and testimonies of Roma leaders proving that identification documents of some Roma and of those having the same life-style had unscripted the words “*Kıpti Müslim*” [Muslim Gypsy] (Çekiç

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designation 133 people that have Kiptice (language of the Kipti / Roma) as their mother tongue (Andrews 1992).

<sup>74</sup> The 1498 Tax Register and the Law concerning the Gypsies in the province of Rumelia issued by Suleiman the Magnificent spoke about regulating the fulfilment of tax obligations by the traveller Gypsies (*gezende/nomads*). Roma sedentarization was also attempted through the 1630 Decree of Sultan Murad IV (Marushiakova & Popov 2001).



2010) or simply “*Kıpti*”<sup>75</sup>, until the 1950s. These IDs are said to have been collected by the authorities at a later stage<sup>76</sup>. The Roma are being also described, by officials and non-Roma in general, with another prejudicial expression: “brunet citizen” [*esmer vatandaş*]<sup>77</sup>, confirming the perception of the Roma that they are still treated as “second class” in Turkey, being identified in a discriminatory manner by their skin colour (Arayıcı 2008:244; Öke & Kurt 2010; Oprişan 2002b). Although it is used less and less, the expression “brunet citizen” is still encountered in public speeches or in the media with a negative effect on the Roma collective memory and on the enforcement of stigma against them. As discussed also in section 1.2.1., Parekh argues that “equal citizenship is essential to fostering a common sense of belonging” (2010:241). However, he further adds that this “is not enough”, because citizenship “is about status and rights; belonging is about acceptance, feeling welcome, a sense of identification. The two do not necessarily coincide. One might enjoy all the rights of citizenship but feel that one does not quite belong to the community and is a relative outsider, as do some groups...” (Ibid).

Although they express loyalty to the country as well as to the Muslim faith, the sense of belonging of the Roma to the Turkish society is challenged by the treatment received from the majority and from the authorities. This can be illustrated by the case of a Roma traditional community leader whom I interviewed in 2003<sup>78</sup>. He emphasized the feeling of privilege due to his descent from the “children of Atatürk” and for “living under the Turkish flag”, while asserting immediately after

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<sup>75</sup> Marushiakova & Popov point out to sources that mention some groups in the Byzantine Empire (that might identify as today’s “Roma”) that were identified as “Athingani” (heathens / name of a heretical sect) / “Tsigani” or “Agupti” / “Egyptians” (Kıpti). These groups were however considered and approached distinctively in the records of the time (1283-9) when it came to collection of taxes (2001:16)

<sup>76</sup> These “Kıpti Müslim” IDs are mentioned by a lot of Roma all over Turkey. Some Roma leaders (E.Ç. in Edirne and Ö.P in Izmir) claim to have preserved these from their elderly relatives. The same documents have been also collected from Çanakkale and Istanbul during the *Buçuk* [The Half] documentary. The data collected for the same documentary contains information according to which, in Tokat (Northern Turkey), the elderly in a Lom family had an old ID mentioning “Haymatlos” (meaning Roma coming from Bulgaria). The *Haymatlos* were sedentary farmers and came with the population exchanges from Bulgaria” (from correspondence with Elmas Arus, president of Zero Discrimination Association, Istanbul, e.mail message of 17.03.2012). The same *Haymatlos* term was mentioned to me as well during other field research I conducted in Gültepe Roma neighbourhood in Kağıthane / Istanbul, back in 2003.

<sup>77</sup> Illustrative news titles: “İlköğretim müdürünün Esmer Vatandaş Projesi’ne Avrupa Birliği’nden 20 bin avroluk kaynak” [20 Thousand Euro Resource from the European Union, for the Primary School Director’s Project on Brunet Citizens] (Haberler 2007); “Esmer vatandaşlara tazminat hakkı!” [Damage Claim Rights to the Brunet Citizens] (Zaman 2010); “Kocaeli’de Esmer Vatandaşlara Ait 20 Adet Baraka Yıkıldı” [20 Huts Belonging to the Brunet Citizens have been Demolished in Kocaeli] (Haber3 2011)

<sup>78</sup> Field notes and Interview “Çoban dede”, 2003 Gültepe, Istanbul; Field notes Uzunköprü 2011

that, in fact, that Roma were treated like “second-hand citizens” in the country. A young Roma man, who lived together with his mother in a tent on the outskirts of Istanbul after being evicted from Küçükbakkalköy, shared a similar sentiment in 2013. He was complaining about the treatment of the municipality staff coming and repeatedly dismantling their tent and taking away their belongings:

Is this what should be done to a Turkish citizen? (...) Are we *gavur* [Non-Muslim / infidel]? Can't we live under the Turkish Republic's flag?

The rise in Islamic conservatism during the AKP rule since 2002 (which promotes a single conception of Islam – the Hanefism) has brought about different venues for religious affiliation and participation, creating alternative bounds – based on faith – to the general secular belonging to the Turkish citizenship. Different Muslim sects started to find followers among the Roma (especially those living in poor neighbourhoods / *gecekondu*) and regular attendance at religious events has become a practice, alongside changes in the manner of dressing and emphasis put on the participation of different layers of the community in classes of Quran (*Kuran kursu*). Moreover, local authorities at times provide the structure (teachers, space and transportation means) for Roma to attend these types of religious classes, visits to religious sites or events. Becoming a “good Muslim” or even proving to be “better Muslims than the Turks”<sup>79</sup> became desirable for many Roma, reason for which they chose to affiliate with certain religious sects (some of them popular among the political leadership of AKP) that they consider instilling respectability and a superior status in the communities where they live. Weber (1948) considered that having honour, prestige, or a religious affiliation, alongside political ties represent important axes of stratification in addition to class status. Notwithstanding, the rush to transform and adapt through religious means seems to be an attempt both of the Roma as well as of the rest of the Muslims society to remove any trace of “Gypsiness” and eventually make the Roma “respectable”.

Following the *Mübadele* (through the *Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations*), signed in Lausanne / Switzerland, on January

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<sup>79</sup> One example is the mosque built with the “community” money (and support from the Cemaat / congregation) in the Roma neighbourhood in Uzunköprü. At the time of the field visit, the person in charge of the premises explained proudly how the Roma children come for the Quran classes and how the Roma in the area are “different” in the better sense, by being “more religious than the Turks” and having proved it by building the mosque (“bigger than other mosques around”) (Field notes Uzunköprü / Turkey, 2012)

30<sup>th</sup>, 1923 (Convention 1923), the governments of Greece and Turkey exchanged more than one million people. According to Baldwin-Edwards, “minimum of 1.3 million Greeks were expelled from Turkey and some 500,000 Muslims were sent to Turkey” (2006:2), also including Muslim Roma (Dragona, 2004:170). The criterion for the exchange was religion rather than ethnicity or mother tongue. Despite the fact that the arriving families were scattered all over Turkey and some survivors still remember unfulfilled promises made by the authorities regarding property allocation (land or houses)<sup>80</sup>, many Roma recall with pride their immediate origins as “coming from Selanik”<sup>81</sup> and consider this event as a symbolic proof of being “wanted” and “chosen” by Atatürk<sup>82</sup>, and ultimately belonging to the Turkish nation<sup>83</sup>. Altogether, there are also testimonies according to which the Roma claimed Turkish identity<sup>84</sup> / origin in order to be included in the planned *Mübadele* exchange<sup>85</sup>. However, according to official reports speaking about the delinquency of the “non-Turks” that were involved in the population exchanges, a certain degree of suspicion from the side of the Government prevailed later on over the Roma who declared themselves also Muslims and Turkish (Eissenstat 2005).

Nowadays, many Roma and non-Roma feel the need to stress the fact that the Roma are “harmless people who do not come against their state, their [Turkish] people and their flag” (Samsun Governorate 2011:57). Moreover, despite the public demarches made by the Government since 2010, there are still Roma who claim that they continue to be discriminated against and that they deserve more attention. The Roma are also outspoken about the fact that they disagree with the similar steps made by the Government towards the inclusion of the Kurds in Turkey since they

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<sup>80</sup> Field Notes of 2003, interview with “Gulistan ana” (78 years old), Tophane / Istanbul

<sup>81</sup> Thessaloniki, the second largest city in Greece, birthplace of Atatürk (1881-1938), the founder of the Turkish Republic

<sup>82</sup> Almost mythical stories are told by the Roma in Samsun who came from Greece in 1920, during the time of the population exchange. They claim that Atatürk personally dealt with their departure and some even claim that their elderly came to Turkey in the same boat with him. Moreover, some consider that “the fact that they renounced their own mother tongue to speak better Turkish is a sign of pride for the Roma in Samsun this being an important indicator of them being more ‘Turkish’ than the other ethnic groups” (Samsun Governorate 2011:47)

<sup>83</sup> Roma community leader in Gültepe / Istanbul: “Alhamdulillah, we are Muslims. We came from Selanik. Atatürk is our father. We are Turkish citizens” (Interview with Çoban Dede, the Çeribaşa in Gültepe / Kağıthane, 2002, Field Notes Istanbul).

<sup>84</sup> Muslim Roma self-declaring as Turks is common in countries like Romania or Bulgaria, where they constitute a “minority within minority” (Grigore & Oprişan 2001). They face multi-layered discrimination on the basis of being Roma, Muslim and “Turks”, reason for which they sometimes self-identify from the perspective of circumstances that would benefit them.

<sup>85</sup> In his memoirs, Reşat Tesal notes that “the Gypsy population of Thrace was included in the population exchanges between Greece and Turkey and came into Turkey as Turks” (1998:27-28)

argue that the “terrorists” [the Kurdish anarchists] should not be more valued in the country than “those who are loyal to the Turkish motherland”. What they imply is that the AKP Government had controversially<sup>86</sup> allowed for a certain liberty in the self-expression of identities, giving rights to ethnic groups that have been obstructed in the past (rights to teach mother tongue, to have TV programmes and air time in mother tongue on national TV, more flexible rights of assembly etc.), the largest “beneficiary” of which seems to have been the “disloyal” Kurds. Although these rights apply to the Roma as well, there have been no notable claims from them in this regard, due to lack of awareness or preparedness.

The Roma in Turkey generally tend to distance themselves from the other ethnic groups in Turkey as well as from the concept of “minority” and embrace more the idea of being integrated part of Turkishness. A Roma man living in an improvised shelter after the demolitions in Küçükbakkalköy stated during an interview in 2014 that the Roma “chose the Turkishness” [*“biz Türklüğü seçtik”*]. Similarly, Senerdem (2010) observed that, the Roma seem to feel as being part of the rest of society in Turkey, something which is unlikely in some European countries.. Although the Roma put emphasis on this sense of belonging, the reality is that the Turkish society in general – the Roma included - continue to fear and reject anything that has connection with the notion of minority. That could be explained also through a predominant perception of the majority population and the policy-makers according to which allowing a minority to gain certain specific rights would potentially lead to demands of self-determination or separatism.

### **3.4. Constructing the Roma Issue after 2002 in Turkey**

#### ***3.4.1. AKP Political Change and Structural Reforms after 2002***

Created from the “ashes” of other pro-Islamist parties<sup>87</sup>, the Justice and Development Party - AKP [*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*] was founded by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2001. Promoting a form of “conservative democracy”<sup>88</sup> and

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<sup>86</sup> Turkish nationalists mainly have been openly against it, sustaining that the citizenship rights should be enough and no special rights should be given based on ethnicities or religious affiliation.

<sup>87</sup> *Saadet Partisi* [Welfare Party] and *Fazilet Partisi* [Justice Party]

<sup>88</sup> In 2005, during the Conference “Turkey on the Way to European Union”, organized by The Economist, Prime Minister Erdoğan declared that his party “is not Muslim, but conservative democrat” (Demir 2005)

putting democratic reforms to comply with the requirements of the EU on the top of its agenda, AKP earned initially the support of different segments of the society and, during the November 2002 elections, won the largest number of seats in the Parliament. The increasing support that the AKP gained in its successive mandates was based on a series of strategic targets: the harmonization of judicial system and human rights practices<sup>89</sup>, the “revisiting” of civil – military relations, accessibility of healthcare and housing credits, building infrastructure and claiming rights for Kurds and non-Muslims. Moreover, AKP managed to get the Turkish economy on track, achieving, for example, a record of growth of approximately 7.5% annually between 2002 and 2011, after two decades of unpopular neoliberal structural reforms of former governments and different crisis which culminated in 2001. The focus on economic advancement also gained support from the “entrepreneurial Muslim bourgeoisie” of conservative population of Turkey, which emerged during the 1980s’ raise of Turkish capitalism (Taşpınar 2012). Additionally, AKP has been using an approach to welfare, which gained the support of different sections of the society, including the poor. Furthermore, it could be argued that the “political rhetoric” that was used to win the support of the population was based upon a synthesis of “free market liberalism with communal values, societal norms and local traditions” (Ünay 2006:167).

However, despite the advertised economic growth, the unemployment rate in Turkey rose from 11% in 2008 to 13.4% by late 2009, as indicated by the Oxford Business Group (2010). Moreover, the efforts for progress made by AKP started to be doubted by secularist / Kemalist state defenders and hints for a hidden agenda gradually started to appear. Some of these doubts relate to the growth of Islamic expression in Turkey and AKP government’s willingness to diminish the political role of the military and to downplay or compromise on different sensitive issues as the Cyprus, the Kurdish and other minority questions. In addition, open for interpretation has been also the oscillation between being pro-West as well as open to the East and the Arab world, the latter being advertised as “an enrichment of Turkey”

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<sup>89</sup> Although Turkey has not signed the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, it has undertaken several legal obligations and political commitments to respect and protect minority rights. Besides the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, Turkey is a state party to the 1948 UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and a participating state in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Moreover, in August 2000, Turkey signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

(Yerkel 2010).

Nevertheless, despite its promises, political analysts consider that the AKP rule has “failed to follow through on promises”, especially in what concerns the revising of the Constitution and implementation of major reforms on “pivotal issues”, such “the Kurdish question, human rights, and freedom of expression” (Taşpınar 2012). The World Press Freedom Index shows that Turkey fell to the 154<sup>th</sup> rank<sup>90</sup> out of 180 countries in the 2014, compared to 116<sup>th</sup> in 2003 when the AKP first came into power. Ultimately, by 2015, before the actual crisis with the crackdown on the freedom of speech, the freedom of press has deteriorated, the peace process started with the Kurdish PKK rebels has not been restored, human rights continued to be threatened and civil society became more fragile and forced to abide the ruling ideology (Pamuk & Hogg 2014).

#### ***3.4.2. Roma Civil Society Formation***

The period between 2002 and 2005 recorded some positive changes in the alignment of the Turkish laws with the EU standards. The civil society gained more ground with the entering into force of the Associations Law No 5253/2004. Removing the former conditions related to the establishment of associations based on “racial, social class, religious and sectarian” grounds, paved the way for different ethnic groups to establish NGOs and equally encouraged the Roma to take a step in getting officially organized. Before the law changed, the expression “getting organized” [Tr. *örgütlenmek*] had a rather threatening connotation, referring to an organizational typology which involved separatist mobilization or even a demarche that led to armed conflict, mainly due to previous Kurdish or leftist experiences, but also due to existing legal constraints. For example, the 1946 amendments of the Turkish Assembly Law [Tr. *Cemiyet Kanunu*] forbade the establishment of associations based on “family, community and race”. In 1972, the Associations Law [Tr. *Dernekler Kanunu*] narrowed down the freedoms of association by introducing the “request for permission” clauses for activities and projects planned. Further on, after the military coup in 1980, the new Associations Law, based on the 1982 Constitution, introduced the concept of “public order” [Tr. *kamu düzeni*], which

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<sup>90</sup> The 2017 World Press Freedom Index ranks Turkey on the 155th place.  
<https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2017>

allowed the state to scrutinize NGOs' activity, fact which inherently drew suspicion over NGOs as having potential links with criminality and being a threat to state authority (Uzpeder 2008:110).

Until 2003-2004, the Roma in Turkey had almost no associational experience. A prominent Roma leader in Edirne considers that the reason for the Roma precarious situation was related to the fact that they generally have never been "an organized society"<sup>91</sup>. Before 2004, when legal improvements for NGOs occurred, attempts to establish Roma associations failed: the first actual Roma NGO in Turkey was closed by the Ministry of Interior shortly after its establishment, allegedly for attempting an "ethnic formation" [Tr. "*etnik yapılaşma*"]. This NGO, called Roma Association for Culture, Social Solidarity and Support [Tr. *Romanlar Kültür Sosyal Dayanışma ve Yardımlaşma Derneği*] was founded in Izmir in 1996 and was closed less than a year later. The founder, Yakup Çardak, attempted to start another NGO in 2003, this time without using the Roma ethnonym: it was called the Association of Musicians from Selanik (Milliyet 2003). This NGO received official approval but started to function only a couple of years later, when other Roma NGOs started to appear. One of the most active NGOs in Turkey, between 2003 and 2011, considered to be the first to get established under the new law, was EDÇİNKAY – Edirne Çingene Kültürü Araştırma ve Yardımlaşma Derneği [Edirne Gypsy Association for Research and Support]<sup>92</sup> which started its work in 2003, but obtained its legal status only in 2004.

Even if at the beginning of 2011 there could be counted around 120 Roma NGOs, with federations in 10 different regions in Turkey, the state still claimed that it had no clear and strong "interlocutors" from the side of the Roma civil society to have a proper dialogue with. The reality was that many of these NGOs were established in the rush to gain from the assumed momentum of the Roma Opening in 2010. Presently, there are over 300 Roma associations, federations and confederations in Turkey. NGOs grouped in different federations have a competitive attitude with each other over legitimacy of power and resources they consider they are entitled to. Moreover, they fear of being deprived of the chance to benefit from

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<sup>91</sup> Field Notes of 2005, interview with Erdinç Çekiç, Roma leader in Edirne

<sup>92</sup> EDÇİNKAY (later on changing its name into EDROM) was one of the NGOs I coached and supported for a period of time. I was also involved in "discovering" and introducing the Roma leader who became the founder and president of this NGO, to different activities related to the Roma movement in Europe.

(EU) money dedicated to them, from “projects”, or simply from state support or any other political gain.

Many of these NGOs are in fact mostly established on paper and leaders attend different meetings for potential (political or financial) gains, but do not have real representativity in their communities. Only a few NGOs had ever implemented any projects by themselves (funded by EU or other donors). The Roma NGOs’ claims are wide, but they lack capacity to actually engage in professional activities. Their leaders are generally part of the “older” generation, little participation from the side of youth or of women being encountered. Learning about different practices of Roma organisations abroad and connecting with European Roma organisations and other institutions has been appealing for Roma NGOs in Turkey who secured membership to organisations like ERGO or ERTF<sup>93</sup>, or got to informally become part of the Balkan Muslim Roma networks.

As a result of the Roma Opening, during the 2011 Parliamentary elections, AKP raised political hopes of the Roma by putting forward a number of Roma MP candidates for nomination they said they would support to gain a seat in the Turkish Parliament. Other political parties seconded this initiative and, in the preliminary selection of the candidates, 4 Roma applied for being nominated: 3 on the lists of AKP and one of CHP (Republican opposition party). Ultimately, none of these candidates qualified since they were placed on inferior positions with very weak chances to come on top of the eligible lists. However, in 2015, CHP included a Roma candidate on the 4<sup>th</sup> place of the list of a Republican winning-city (Izmir), which finally earned him a place in the Turkish Parliament.

### ***3.4.3. The AKP Roma Opening [Roman Açılımı]***

In spite of the initial appreciation for the acknowledgement of the Roma issues, the “Opening” demarches (alongside the Kurdish or the Alevi Openings) have been heavily criticized for their conceptualization, for putting an emphasis on ethnicity or faith, differentiating groups that do not have a real ethnic awareness and

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<sup>93</sup> I was the Chair of the Board of ERGO until 2014 and have organized the first election of Roma representatives from Turkey to the ERTF back in 2005. EDROM has been an associated member of ERGO and its president was a candidate for ERTF representativity, but was not elected. Three Roma representatives were elected as delegates to the ERTF at the time, among which the first Roma MP in Turkey (for the Republican Party CHP, elected in 2015 – Özcan Purçu).



that are “already integrated in the society”, for creating unrealistic expectations instead of proposing practical solutions for their situation improvement and for using these initiatives for pure political gain (Akpınar 2012).

In preparation of the Roma Opening, the Government organized a seminar in Istanbul, on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009, with the reported participation of 130 Roma associations and 11 federations. The report of the Seminar incorporated the needs expressed by the Roma and listed the priorities for possible intervention: a) Social Prejudices; b) Education; c) Unemployment and Vocational Training; d) Shelter – Housing; e) Health; f) Organization; g) Discriminatory Provisions and Law Enforcement Agencies’ Approach; h) Identity Papers; and i) The Decade for the Roma Project<sup>94</sup> (TC 2010). In regards to housing, the report<sup>95</sup> of this preparatory seminar mentioned the fact that the authorities mandated to find solutions for the Roma are not open to dialogue and moreover “manifest inhuman attitudes and behaviours” towards them. The report stated further that TOKI should build for Roma “houses with gardens, according to their budget, instead of large apartments in multi-storey buildings”. According to the report, the Roma participants emphasized that they do not want to move away from their neighbourhoods and that the urban transformation should not take place without social transformation (TC 2010:19).

The next year, on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the Roma Opening was announced by the Prime Minister Erdoğan during a public event, which gathered around 18,000 Roma from different areas of Turkey. Faruk Çelik, the Minister of Labour and Social Protection, was appointed as official “in charge of the Roma”. Following the promises made publically during the event of the “Opening”, a housing programme was launched for the Roma. The programme, however, has been criticized by the civil society for lacking accountability towards the Roma. In 2011, Minister Çelik declared that the implementation of the “Opening” plans proceeded “well”: “We have rolled up our sleeves to solve the issue of housing and accommodation. (...) We are also focusing on education and public employment. The process of integration is working well” (Akbeý 2011). However, the 2011 EU Progress Report on Turkey emphasized that the “Opening” has not led “to a comprehensive strategy to address the problems of the Roma population. Roma still face social exclusion,

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<sup>94</sup> EU Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) was an initiative of OSI-WB-UN-EU reflecting a political commitment of governments to address the social inclusion of Roma

<sup>95</sup> “Roman Çalıştayı Raporu” [Report of the Roma Seminar], Seminar held on 10.12.2009 at Conrad Hotel, Istanbul, Published in January 2010 in Ankara by the State Ministry of the Turkish Republic

marginalisation and discrimination in access to education and health services due to their lack of identity cards, and also to housing, employment and participation in public life” (EC 2011a).

A re-launching of the Roma Opening was done by the AKP Government in 2015 under the title “Roma Workshop in the Vision of the New Turkey<sup>96</sup>” (7-8 February 2015) and added to the main priorities of Roma inclusion (education, housing, health, employment) a new target called “Narcotics and crimes against public order”. Although the announcement was made in a festive environment during which an extensive number of Roma NGOs acclaimed the governmental representatives present, the issue raised concerns among some activists and Roma NGO representatives. Consequently, some complained about it in the media, saying that the Roma Opening managed only to create the awareness of the Roma to pursue their citizenship rights; otherwise “the Roma issue” did not seem to have advanced “beyond making the society laugh”: “Drugs and public order have been included at the core of the Roma issue, in a way highlighting that the Roma are potential criminals. In a way, our struggle against discrimination and fighting prejudices has been undermined” (ODATV 2015). This Roma Opening follow-up workshop was initiated by the Istanbul Roma Associations Federation (known for being established by the AKP authorities) and by the Istanbul Provincial Directorate for Family and Social Policies of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in Turkey (ministry in charge of Roma issues).

#### ***3.4.4. Governmental Attempts to Include Roma in Social Policies***

Mainly as a result of incongruences between the definition of “minorities” and the target of EU funding, Turkey has, at times, rejected specific financial support for the Roma from the European Commission (IPA–Instrument for Pre-Accession) and other initiatives like the “Decade of Roma Inclusion”. Moreover, Turkey has repeatedly ignored the recommendations of EU bodies for the protection of its

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<sup>96</sup> “New Turkey” [Tr. *Yeni Türkiye*] is a concept used by President Erdoğan and his government to define the reforms that allegedly would bring stability and “modernity” in Turkey. These reforms include changing the Constitution and transforming Turkey into a Presidential Republic rather than a Parliamentary one and therefore giving the President powers, which would allow him to change the country according to his vision.

diverse population groups<sup>97</sup>. Despite being a member of CoE since 1949, most of the provisions regarding protection of human and minority rights, including the Roma, have been generally ineffective in Turkey. Turkey took up the recommendation and accepted a Roma mediators training, as part of the “Strasbourg Declaration” that it also signed (CoE 2010). The Declaration stressed on “the process of inclusion of Roma” that contribute to the “social cohesion, democratic stability and to the acceptance of diversity”. During two sessions in 2011, 20 Roma were trained<sup>98</sup> to work on mediation between schools and Roma communities in Turkey. While the Roma mediators are used in fields of education, employment and health in Europe, Turkey chose education as field for the pilot training, having in mind that the dropout rates of Roma children in Turkey have been “higher than those of other children” (EC 2011a). However, long after this initiative, there has been no commitment from the side of the authorities to adopt the work of those mediators in their system<sup>99</sup>.

Following the Roma Opening, a number of seminars have been organized by different ministries, aiming to assess the situation of Roma<sup>100</sup> in the country. On December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR) announced the “Operation for the Support of Active Integration in Turkey”. On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012, the Ministry of Education (MoE) announced the joint “Operation in Support of Raising the Social Inclusion in the Places Densely Inhabited by the Roma” with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Family and Social Policy; Roma NGOs were consulted in the process. However, a change in the MoE administration in July 2012 resulted in the cancellation of the project. The responsible Undersecretary in MoE justified this decision by bringing up the Turkish laws, which do not allow for actions addressing specific ethnic groups, hence the Roma.

One other initiative of policy development in the field came from the Roma NGO Zero Discrimination Association (ZDA) who launched the Roma Public

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<sup>97</sup> France and Turkey are the only countries that have not signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (CoE 1994).

<sup>98</sup> I was one of the trainers of this group, representing the ROMED Programme of CoE.

<sup>99</sup> The Roma Strategy adopted in 2016 includes the use of mediators. The first project for the implementation of the Strategy includes the training and employment of Roma community mediators. The project (SIROMA - <http://siromatr.net/>) ends in 2017 and, according to the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, the “mediators” of the project are envisaged to be employed at local level under a different name.

<sup>100</sup> “TAIEX Seminar on Roma”, by Presidency of Political Affairs, EU General Secretariat of the Prime Minister’s Office (15-16.11.2010); “Access to Quality Education for Children at Risk: Roma Children and Education”, by MoE (18-19.02.2011); “Integration of Our Roma Citizens on the Labour Market”, by Ministry of Labour, General Directorate for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and İŞKUR (15-16.09.2011).

Administration - NGOs Dialogue Group [Tr. *Kamu-STK Dialog Grubu*] gathering NGOs and ministries to discuss Roma policies and support the drafting of the first Roma Strategy. The Group had a successful summit organized in December 2012 and its work has been mentioned as a good practice in the Government's own Country Progress Report for the European Commission at the very beginning of 2013. As of December 2015, the Group gained legal status, by establishing itself into an association named RODA. The representatives of the ministries participate either on individual capacities or when delegated by the ministries to attend meetings / activities of common interest. The Ministry of Family and Social Policies, which replaced the Ministry of Labour in the coordination of "Roma file" under the Roma Opening and was supposed to elaborate a consolidated Country Strategy for the Roma<sup>101</sup>, benefitted from the work of this Group. The Group met regularly for two years and discussed the stages and content of policy design on Roma. The other ministries delegating representatives to these meetings were: Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry for EU Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and İŞKUR. The consultations with the Roma civil society have been extensive, however any time a new minister or the staff delegated for this work changed position, the work had to be restarted, no institutional memory being retained.

#### ***3.4.5. EU Pressure for Targeted Policies on Roma***

Turkey has been slow in materializing the promises made towards the social inclusion of Roma. The subject highly publicized by the Turkish government, through the Roma Opening understandably raised high expectations both among the Roma in Turkey, as well as at the level of the European bodies "watching" over the issue. On these grounds, the European Commission included the expected steps to be taken by the Turkish state on Roma inclusion, in the negotiations for visa liberalization<sup>102</sup>. A communication of the Commission in 2014 tackled the lack of

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<sup>101</sup> Decision announced on 18.07.2012 by the Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdağ and the Minister of Family and Social Policy, Fatma Şahin, in a meeting with the participation of all ministries' Undersecretaries.

<sup>102</sup> In parallel with the EU-Turkey readmission agreement signed on 16 December 2013, the EU and Turkey launched the visa liberalization "dialogue" aimed at "ending the visa requirement for Turkish citizens travelling to the Schengen area for a short-term visit". A document called 'Roadmap towards the visa-free regime with Turkey', produced by the Commission in close consultation with relevant

concrete strategic steps in the field by stating that Turkey needs “to adopt and implement a comprehensive strategy and action plan to improve the situation for people with Roma heritage living in Turkey, as well as legislation to prevent discrimination and facilitate social inclusion” (EC 2014a).

The 2015 European Commission Progress Report on Turkey highlighted the fact that as concerns the fulfilment of political criteria, “the pace of reforms slowed down” in Turkey, while “the Turkish economy is well advanced and can be considered a functioning market economy”. Moreover, in terms of adopting EU legislation, Turkey “continued to align with the *acquis communautaire*, albeit at a slower pace, and has achieved a good level of preparation in many areas” (EC 2015). However, despite some progress in the field of protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the EC concluded that “major shortcomings” remained. In this regard, the report underlined the fact that there is “an urgent need to adopt a comprehensive framework law on combating discrimination in line with European standards”. Moreover, Turkey was also asked to “ensure sufficient attention to the social inclusion of vulnerable groups such as the Roma” (EC 2015). In 2016, the Commission repeated the emphasis on the need for “development of comprehensive measures to facilitate social inclusion of its Roma population” (EC 2016), before the actual announcement of the finalization of the Roma Strategy by the Government.

### 3.5. Conclusion

Centuries after their attestation on the European territories, the numerous groups and sub-groups self-identified, assumed or indicated to be part of the generic umbrella-term “Roma”<sup>103</sup> have been struggling with exclusion, stigma and prejudiced perceptions which continue to reflect on their trajectory and status. Targeted by policies for minorities, disadvantaged or vulnerable populations, the socio-economic situation of the Roma has still great room for improvement. The EU and its member or candidate states have politically committed to tackle the Roma

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experts from EU Member States, sets out the requirements for visa liberalization which are: document security, migration management, public order and security, fundamental rights and readmission of irregular migrants. The European Commission has as objective to complete the visa liberalization process with Turkey by October 2016 (EC 2014b)

<sup>103</sup> Surdu & Kovacs consider the reinforcement of the Roma label as an umbrella category for policy purposes should also be assessed for the effects that it produces *vis-a-vis* promoting a positive identity for diverse groups ostracised over time as Gypsies and currently conceptualised as Roma (2015:6)

issue and to close gaps in education, health, housing and employment. However, in most countries, Roma are increasingly victims of discrimination, anti-Gypsyism is on the rise and the Western European countries have to face the arrival of Roma migrants who look for better opportunities away from their Eastern European countries where they still live in poverty and exclusion even after European integration.

From a legal point of view, the Roma (together with the Lom, the Dom and the Abdal) in Turkey are part of the majority Muslim population, and no specific targeted policy addressed their situation's improvement until 2016 when the Government issued the first Roma Strategy, after increased EU pressure. The "negation" of ethnicities within the majority Muslim population in Turkey and their "equalization" under the citizenship status has led to an invisibilization of the Roma. Their unequal position is overseen and neglected, driving them further into marginalization. Through the 2010 Governmental Roma Opening, the state has recognised the fragility of their condition and has been attempting to advance on its promises. One of the main promises referred to the provision of housing, which started to be implemented in a manner that lacked transparency. The poor capacity and mechanisms of reaction of the Roma civil society were the reasons for which no consistent demands for accountability were advanced.

The Roma in Turkey got more attention from the EU than the Kurdish issue which has been affecting Turkey since 1984 through its armed conflict. The EU included the Roma issue in its visa liberalization package with Turkey and this constituted the trigger that led to the issuing of the Roma Strategy in 2016. The Roma are not the most disadvantaged group in Turkey, but the Turkish Government chose to address the Roma issues in a particular manner. In this case, I would argue that by using the Roma – as a less demanding and "harmless" group – to initiate specific / targeted policies and respond to the EU demands, the Government used a populist approach mainly to serve its own interests. Policy design and ultimately promises for services delivery for the Roma bring good political support for the Government (the Roma being ardent political supporters of AKP and Erdoğan). Welfare provision disguised in "gift-giving" and givers in "saviours" have the power to instil loyalty and dedication in the conscience of a marginalized group.

Regardless of the difference in official status and their historical trajectory, poverty and exclusion are similar treats of both the Roma in Turkey and those living

in other countries of Europe. Either living in a *gecekondu* in Turkey or in a segregated settlement or *ghetto* in Europe, the Roma occupy spaces of shared poverty. The disenfranchising policies applied by different states for centuries resulted in an association between the Roma people's ethnicity and the poverty and inferiority labels, determining their life chances. This conferred the Roma an unequal status that reflected in their appetite and capacity to exercise their citizenship rights, as discussed in the section 1.2.1 of this thesis. The amount of policies for the Roma that came about alongside the concerns for EU integration, did not do much in changing the lives of the most vulnerable and are moreover considered to have had accelerated the social exclusion and the polarization between majority populations and the Roma communities (Nicolae 2012b). Regardless of the stimulation of Roma civil society development and the various types of involvement exercised both at European and at the Turkish state level, the visible Roma communities' condition did not improve and their members did not find the necessary resources to exercise their full rights. Poverty and exclusion are enduring and superficial attempts to reform systems and change mentalities that generate exclusion are not prone to bring results for those in need. The lack of adapted / adaptable social inclusion systems, to accommodate the real needs of the vulnerable, visible Roma communities, leads to a perpetuation of disadvantage in which citizens trade away their rights for security and do not participate into finding and applying viable solutions for redress. The main responsibility of sustainably changing the situation of the poor and excluded communities stands with the state and its institutions, them being the ones that perpetuate inequality but also the ones who can change the status quo.

## **4. MECHANISMS OF SURVIVAL AND LIVELIHOODS STRATEGIES OF THE ROMA**

Poor people manage to survive in their precarious state by employing a variety of coping mechanisms and livelihoods strategies (Chambers 1995; Rakodi 1997; Wratten 1995). For the Roma in Turkey, long ignored by any state policies, invisibility has been both a tool of exclusion used on them by the power structures, as well as a self-strategy to cope with such exclusion and marginalization.

The chapter explains the connection between different forms of invisibility of the Roma, their social exclusion and poverty and related coping mechanisms and livelihoods strategies employed. The information gathered in this chapter resulted from examining the influence of the post-2010 (post-Roma Opening) policies on the situation of Roma and more specifically of those that targeted the households affected by state's official housing and urban transformation policies. Moreover, the chapter reviews Roma households' livelihoods strategies and desired outcomes, from the perspective of a sustainability framework that analysed their assets and capabilities, the context of their vulnerability and the transforming structures and processes that have an influence on their livelihood condition and status. The Chapter brings together the different dimensions of Roma disenfranchisement and endurance, it frames their individual and collective survival and builds further the response to the second sub-question of this research which refers to the strategies and position the Roma took in dealing with the state policies that specifically targeted or simply invisibilized them. Nevertheless, both the actions of the state as well as the response of the Roma provide a perspective on the dimension of poverty and social exclusion that the Roma face.

### **4.1. Invisibility as Vulnerability and as Coping Mechanism**

#### ***4.1.1. Structural Invisibilization of Roma***

Invisibility is one important analytical tool for studying vulnerable communities. Arguing that invisibility is a function of governmentality, Hammond emphasized that invisibilization "is a particular brand of marginalization that effectively removes people from the gaze of the public" as well as governments and



anyone who could influence their status in a positive manner (2008:2). Moreover, Carter defined invisibility as “a way of making the seen disappear in plain sight” and argued that invisibility is “orchestrated by the state or through its functionaries” (2010:13).

The Roma in Turkey were kept rather invisible within the category of the majority Muslim population, unrecognized otherwise by the state as a particular (ethnic) group and therefore unaddressed in a targeted manner up until 2010 when the Roma Opening was launched. The implications of this official categorization can be analysed from different perspectives: it could be emphasized that it carried a degree of “inclusiveness”, since there was no official differentiation between the Roma and the other populations of the “majority”, however it was de facto disempowering and hence “silencing” for different ethnic and religious groups, including the Roma, inside of the “majority” population. Additionally, the Alevi Roma or the Abdal had to subject themselves to a double form of invisibility: both due to their ethnic origins as well as for their faith. Generally, the Alevis in Turkey are known for facing longstanding prejudice and persecution due to their faith which led them “to deny publicly” their identity and “to practice Alevi rituals in secret” (Mandel 1989:34).

The invisibility of the Roma before the Roma Opening did not mean that they were out of sight. They have been visible in the Turkish society; however there has been no effort from the side of the power holders towards understanding their true condition and addressing their issues. The Roma have been at best perceived in a demeaning romantic manner by the majority populations, being characterized mainly as a group with artistic inclinations, rather exotic and not necessarily equal in their status and capabilities with the rest of the society. Both Roma and state officials claimed, at times, that the Roma have no problems in Turkey, that they are “well loved” by everyone, since they are “happy, jolly people”<sup>104</sup> who would never create any problems or have never attempted to denigrate the state<sup>105</sup>, hence being inoffensive, and therefore unthreatening and worthy of tolerance. This type of

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<sup>104</sup> Statement made in a speech by the representative of the Ministry of Health in Turkey during the opening of the joint UNFPA EECARO – WHO “Roma health resource workshop” (26-27 October 2013, Istanbul)

<sup>105</sup> An allusion to other groups, especially the Kurds who have been challenging the authority of the Turkish state through the armed conflict in Southeast Turkey for decades.

acceptance and acknowledgement fosters a form of invisibilization and condescension since “tolerance” does not signify “inclusion”.

The Roma themselves, however, have sometimes contributed to their own process of invisibilization. There are numerous cases that illustrate an unsettling attitude of the Roma attempting to protect or to explain the rather abusive behaviour of the authorities or of other figures of power towards them. This could hint at a form of collective effect of trauma similar to “Stockholm Syndrome”<sup>106</sup> that has been developing at the level of Roma communities. For example, although there is clear evidence that many Roma families became victims of the urban regeneration projects conducted by the government and have no alternative housing or resources for survival during AKP rule, many continue to praise the Government and the AKP for their actions. Many Roma overlook the fact that the charismatic figure of Tayyip Erdoğan<sup>107</sup>, who officially recognized the problems of the Roma and called them “brothers”, promising improvement and better housing, is the same authority under which urban regeneration projects are allowed to destroy the Roma neighbourhoods and render them more vulnerable than before. During an interview in 2014, a Roma man living with his family in a tent, in the vicinity of the demolished house he had formerly inhabited, seemed genuinely convinced that the Prime Minister “thinks” about their “children’s future”<sup>108</sup>. By the same token, the Roma are easy prey for different leaders who use them for political gains. Three male household heads in Küçükbakkalköy whom I interviewed had their houses demolished and lived in tents or in other family members’ homes, but they all believed, however, that the same government, which left them homeless, had brought them many “advantages”, despite the situation:

We’ve seen so many good things from those people...before the man [then the Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan] came in that position, we could not go to the hospital; [now] they give us medicines for free...at least. Since this man came, we manage to get coal in the winter<sup>109</sup>.

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<sup>106</sup> The Stockholm syndrome is known as “Survival Identification Syndrome” and refers to a pattern of coping with a traumatic situation, a paradoxical emotional involvement that occurs between a victim and perpetrator.

<sup>107</sup> Prime Minister between 2003 and 2014 and President of Turkey after 2014

<sup>108</sup> Interviews Küçükbakkalköy, 13.05.2014 (C)

<sup>109</sup> At the time of the visit, a wooden barrack built in the yard of another family, where one of the interviewed persons used to live with his family, just burned to the ground. When I asked what good does it bring receiving coal when one does not have a house but lives in a tent or a barrack, they hesitated to answer and smiled in silence.

Notwithstanding, many official discourses in Turkey since 2010 tend to put emphasis on the rough treatment the Roma face elsewhere in Europe in comparison to the tolerance Turkey exhibits towards them. This type of invisibilizing discourse entirely obscures the poverty and the abuses that the Roma in Turkey fall victims to, especially during the AKP rule when the urban regeneration projects and the evictions of Roma from the old neighbourhoods escalated and have been affecting their livelihoods in greater extent than ever before.

Since 2010, the Government's Roma-targeted policies which attempt to address the vulnerability of the Roma people's status and livelihoods have situated the Roma in a sort of yo-yo ride between visibility and invisibility, between objects of social justice at discourse level and excluded subjects of charity at a concrete, practical level. These policies have made the Roma aware of themselves as a distinct group, more visible to the rest of the society and to the different power structures, therefore rendering their exclusion more visible. As discussed also in section 1.2.2. of this dissertation, these policies had a dichotomic effect on their status. The Roma were visible in the past through their precarious presence in the poor and centrally located *gecekondu* of the cities, however they were invisible in state policies and their needs for targeted support were ignored. Once AKP recognized officially the need for addressing their situation in 2010, the Roma started to become visible in policies as well. However, due to urban regeneration that gained speed after AKP came into rule, the Roma started to be forced out from urban centres, in an attempt to be dragged back into a form of invisibilization, where their poverty would be hidden from the eyes of the city and would not affect its development. From the old *gecekondu* neighbourhoods, the Roma are either offered alternatives of new apartment blocks built on the outskirts (that is if they owned the homes targeted by urban regeneration), or are left to find other informal settlements to live in and invent new strategies of survival. Situated in central / visible or outskirts / invisible spaces, both the *gecekondu* and the new apartment blocks schemes are spaces of exclusion for the Roma where they have to struggle continuously to sustain their livelihoods.

#### ***4.1.2. Invisibility as Mechanism of Survival***

The long-lasting lack of reaction to Roma peoples' vulnerability by state power structures has induced a form of two-fold invisibility: propagated by the state

and utilized by the Roma as a mechanism of survival. Moreover, the Roma in Turkey have used this invisibility to further attempt “to resemble the others” and to assimilate<sup>110</sup>, such self-invisibilization is in itself a mechanism of survival. Others have formally blended in, while privately conserving their ethnic specificities, finding niches of survival and development away from their ethnic patterns. An example in this regard is the case of the Lom in the Northern city of Artvin who have managed to preserve in a certain extent their identity while using their invisibility in society to exploit opportunities given to the majority. Research shows that the Lom have the highest level of education and are the best represented in regulated middle-class-type of jobs among the Roma groups in Turkey (ZDA - Oprişan 2014). The Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) indicated that low education and numerous household members are important factors that trigger poverty and that the higher the education level of an individual / family, the lower seems to be the poverty risk<sup>111</sup> (TURKSTAT 2009). The Lom, through some community representatives, exhibited a form of circumstantial identity expression, by choosing to become “visible” in terms of making some claims for recognition and support only around the time of the 2010 governmental “Roma Opening”, when the benefits of doing so appeared more plausible. Unlike the majority of the Roma and the Dom, the Lom have also the additional advantage of a physical appearance (mostly fair skin) that helps them to blend in the majority population of the area. Additionally, the environment in which the Lom live constitutes an important factor in helping them

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<sup>110</sup> While doing research on the Roma dialects in Turkey, in 2002 - 2003, I faced different forms of rejection from my respondents or their family members, under the pretext that they did not want to be “identified” by “others” as Gypsies / Roma. Although some were happy that an “outsider” puts value on their ethnicity and what they knew, decided they did not want this to be openly recognized, out of shame or fear of a potential persecution. My intention to document what was left from the dialects the Roma (used to) speak was received with surprise by many of the informants I identified in the Roma communities and extremely limited number of people actually decided to respond to my interview questions up until the end. Speaking Romanes or an altered form of it (mixed most of the times with forms of Turkish words and with jargon) was a way to keep some conversations secret from the *gadje* [non-Roma] and especially when authorities (police) entered the neighbourhood. When trying to find respondents in the Roma community in Edirne, I was taken by one of the most known Roma leaders to interview his mother who allegedly spoke very well Romanes. When I was left alone with her to start the work to which she initially agreed to, she turned on me with very harsh admonitions. She claimed that she struggled all her life to keep her children away from the Romani language and “Romanlık” [Romaniness] in order not to be identified as Roma in the society; to give them a “chance” to be like others, not to be like them [the parents]. Therefore, she perceived my demarche as a potential threat of “exposing” her family to potential discrimination. As a result, the planned interview was cancelled.

<sup>111</sup> In 2009, TURKSTAT calculated Turkey’s poverty rate at 39.59% among illiterate persons, 13.44% among graduates from elementary or professional schools, 5.64% among the graduates of two-year higher education establishments and at 0.71% among the higher education graduates (TURKSTAT 2009).

keep their invisibility while protecting their identities. Contrary to the general tendency of the Dom as well as the Roma to live in clustered communities, the Lom generally live scattered and mostly mixed with the local population.

Dispersing Roma is considered at times a solution for integration, both by some Roma as well as by the authorities. During one of the field visits in Samsun, in 2013, when interviewing the Governor of Samsun, he spoke about his plans of “moving” a neighbourhood and “scattering” the Roma around the city among other inhabitants, as a method of “integrating them better”. He pointed out that the reason for this approach had to do with the negative experience of the “200 Roma Houses” Scheme where the Roma were relocated all together in the same settlement and where the provision of housing did not solve their social inclusion issue, their poverty and exclusion remaining clustered and moving places along with them.

For some people, moving “elsewhere”, away from the Roma settlement, represents a way to distance themselves from a stigmatized condition. A Roma man who left Küçükkbakkalköy with his family after the demolitions, considered that there was a positive side to what happened since now his wife and other women in his family could be free to be like the *gadje* [non-Roma] and dress like them, without being judged by the rest of the community or relatives who kept them “confined” in the tradition and did not allow them to be like the others. In one of the interviews of 2014, the well-known Roma woman leader in Turkey, Elmas Arus, considers that there is a need for interaction and input from others<sup>112</sup> in order for something to change, as “people will not change if they do not see an alternative”. She further added that her own relatives who scattered and lived sometimes among the non-Roma learned from the others “how to live, how to do things”, but those who lived in more marginal areas, all together, in the Roma neighbourhoods, continue to inhabit the same houses, “eating on the floor from the same stew pot”, not fixing anything around the house because they say that they might need to move somewhere else. She added that some of these people were not poor: “they made a lot of money through business deals, owning even plaza office buildings and having wives with arms full of gold bracelets up to the elbow”. In her opinion, this behaviour might have originated not from poverty and its related insecurity, but from the perpetuation of a nomadic lifestyle mentality in which “everything is ephemeral”. Therefore,

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<sup>112</sup> Tr. “Değişim için etkileşim olması lazım”

sometimes it is not poverty that keeps people in the position of outsiders; it is their lack of adaptability or the incapacity of the society to accommodate or include them.

The “choice” of some Roma to de-emphasize their ethnic origin, mainly before 2002, by obscuring their identities and going even further and seeking assimilation, could be identified in what Scott describes as a “weapon of the weak” (Scott 1985, in Polzer & Hammond 2008:418); a method of the vulnerable to protect themselves from the same powers that rendered them invisible by not addressing them. Generally, a certain fragility of the Roma in Turkey can be perceived when they recognize their ethnic identity, as they still refuse to be categorized or associated with other minorities in the country. This is because they do not want to be affiliated with the non-Muslims, “the others” of the Turkish society, which are the minorities named in the Treaty of Lausanne (the Jews, the Armenians and the Greeks) due to the fact that these groups are largely perceived as threatening elements for the country’s reputation. Their perception of the “minority” term reflects, to a certain extent, what Guibernau & Rex called a “relative lack of power” (2010:343). During field research, many Roma made reference to the fact that they were among the founding populations of the Republic and that they were primarily Turkish and only secondarily Roma. Moreover they put emphasis also on the fact that they have been serving the country through their military service and that some Roma soldiers became “martyrs” both in the battles of Çanakkale<sup>113</sup> and in the Southeast Turkey conflict between the Turkish army and the Kurdish guerrillas. Being part of country’s military protection forces and becoming “martyrs” is considered ultimate proof of patriotism and reason for belonging to the community of the “accepted”. Despite being aware of their marginalized social condition and rather inferior position as citizens, many Roma tend to act as overzealous Turkish nationalists. Their self-assimilationist and nationalist discourse supports Gramsci’s (1971) arguments on hegemony that makes reference to the relationship “maintained between those who dominate within the state and those who are dominated” (Schiller et al. 2004:222), which involves here an active consent from the side of the dominated. Moreover, this willingness to subordinate their identity to a more powerful one is sometimes internalized, creating “a sense of common loyalty and legitimacy for the dominant classes” (Ibid). Ultimately, the Roma use this relationship of voluntary subordination

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<sup>113</sup> Çanakkale is the place where about 253,000 Turkish soldiers lost their lives in the Battle of Gallipoli, between April 1915 and December 1915, during the First World War.

to the power structures and the dominant class both as survival mechanism as well as a livelihood strategy.

#### ***4.1.3. The Gatekeepers and the Lucrative Politics of Roma Visibility***

In Turkey, as in other countries of Europe during the EU pre-accession period, Roma civil society organizations started to grow and passed through a process called by some as “NGOization”.

Looking at the record of Roma NGOs’ establishment in Turkey since 2005, when “NGOisation” took speed, similarities can be identified with other countries of Europe, where EU funding and post-1990 policies on Roma have also created a good number of activists who managed to a certain extent to become skilled at writing projects to fit the EU designed guidelines, while many NGOs continued to lack capacities and later on disappeared. In Turkey, the emerging community ethnic entrepreneurs or gatekeepers and their “handbag” associations [*çanta dernekleri*], as some Roma call them, have managed in a limited extent to access these resources, at least up to 2015 until this dissertation’s research is focused on. Before 2013, no more than seven NGOs from the approximately 300 that could be counted by 2015 in Turkey had applied for funding to donors and got to implement projects in their communities. While many Roma NGOs in Europe have been well funded for a while thanks to the EU and other sources (e.g.: OSI), this has not been a real mechanism of development or consistent financial gain for the Roma NGO sector in Turkey, due mainly to the lack of professional capacities of these organisations but also to the late availability and restrictions of funding. For this reason, regardless of their intent and aspirations, many Roma “leaders” establishing NGOs in Turkey genuinely struggle to keep them “functioning”, while trying to cope with the demands of their own private households. There are countless examples of leaders who strive to keep their NGOs open. However, many do not manage to cope with the smallest membership fees, since the members that have been listed in the statutory documents of the NGO are not able to provide any financial contribution. Therefore it is common to see NGOs being established and disappearing after a short while, while their former “presidents” continue to participate in different events solely as self-proclaimed

“leaders” or “activists”<sup>114</sup>. Some of the leaders interviewed asserted the fact that they genuinely believed that through the NGO they could manage to lift their communities out of poverty, by linking them with the power-holders. Others, hoped that leading an organisation would bring them recognition and a place in politics. In many cases, the NGOs are seen as channels or tools to reach to power and resources. Some NGO leaders admit encountering criticism and disapproval from their spouses or other family members for dedicating time and money to “these kind of things.” They say that there is a risk of diminishing their reputation by getting involved in the Roma issues. A young Roma president of an association in Dikili / Izmir stated that he planned to close his association since he needed to go with his wife to the markets and sell vegetables instead of “losing time and money with the NGO”. The president of a Roma association in Samsun said he also locks the door of the NGO’s only room and goes to sell balloons during the summer to make money and be able to support his family, but also to keep the NGO “open”. Projects of these NGOs are almost inexistent, their main activity consisting in participating in meetings and being “mediators” between the communities they (claim to) represent and the local administration. For many NGOs, who have no capacity or opportunity to access funding<sup>115</sup>, civic involvement is a struggle. Some people involved in NGOs cannot afford to exert active citizenship since their personal needs take priority over the collective consciousness.

There are also Roma / Dom / Lom / Abdal who have established or become members of civic or professional associations in order to act as an interface in the relationship with the local authorities in the delivery of local services, like Troydem Edirne NGO (Thrace Disabled Roma Association) who acts as “implementing” agency of relief support on behalf of the Red Crescent or other local and regional authorities. Additionally, there are also Roma who established entrepreneur

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<sup>114</sup> The former presidents of Roma associations in Küçükbakkalköy and in Dolapdere (Istanbul), belonging to areas affected by urban regeneration, or the president of the Dom association in Diyarbakır (which was closed and opened again for the same reasons), alongside others, participate in Roma related meetings as activists since they could not keep their NGOs open due to lack of resources.

<sup>115</sup> An UNDP report mentioned the fact that the “contract-based relations with the state to provide welfare services undermine their [NGOs] independence”. According to UNDP, these relations “corrupted the civil society which is no longer a watchdog of the governmental actions”; “funds create dependency of NGOs – limiting and transforming the identity of the NGOs”. In this way, the NGOs “become gradually detached from the community and also they lose courage to challenge the fundamental structure of the system which created and reproduces inequality” (2012b:53,55)



associations for snail and frog “catching”<sup>116</sup> or for scrap collection with the support of authorities or independently. For example, the Edirne Association for Support and Development of Frog and Snail Collectors [Tr. *Kurbağa ve Salyangoz Toplayıcıları Yardımlaşma ve Kalkınma Derneği*] was established by a former Roma barber who used to catch and sell frogs and snails for 15 years. It is reported that the Edirne Governorate and other vocational training entities in town employ approximately 50 Roma from Edirne in this “venture”. Again in the semi-urban setting of Edirne, in 2014, with the support of the Governorate, which has been actively engaged in funding or facilitating different Roma civil society initiatives during his mandate, the Association for the Support of Scrap Collectors [Tr. *Hurda Toplayıcıları ve Yardımlaşma Derneği*] opened a Deposit for Sortation and Packing of different types of scrap and waste. These small businesses employed local Roma. However these types of entrepreneurship and income generation examples are not encountered among the Roma targeted by the case studies of this thesis which focus on the displaced communities due to urban regeneration in urban areas of Samsun and in Küçükbakkalköy / Istanbul.

There are also cases in which Roma have enrolled in political parties and engage in activities which attempt to improve the welfare of the people living in their neighbourhoods. Although these actions are connected to political ambitions, by earning the trust of the community and of some political party leadership, unsustainable as they are, they manage sometimes to provide immediate relief to some of the people in need. In Küçükbakkalköy, immediate support has been provided to some displaced inhabitants living in barracks and tents, also outside the electoral period. Interviewed beneficiaries of such aid stated that the local Roma “leader”, who served as intermediary for such aid, arranged for them to receive supplies every month (dry food that comes from the municipality – a package with oil, sugar, beans, tomato paste, salt). One Roma woman living in the last standing house of the former *gecekondu* planned for demolition in Küçükbakkalköy, considers that this food aid is “...a good thing; everybody gets it; neighbours too.... We can use it for 10-15 days; we get to manage like this”.

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<sup>116</sup> Association’s establishment appeared in the local media (Hudut 2011) as well as in news reclaiming the “abuse” of intermediary companies who buy from them the frogs and snails at a lower price and sell them at significantly higher prices to other companies in Turkey or abroad (Radikal 2013)

This aid of basic food items has a good value since families are helped to survive. However the manner in which the aid is delivered keeps the recipient families in a position of indebted victims and not of rights-holder citizens. Gratitude goes to the giver (municipality / party), but also to the “mediator” of the aid received, although the food supplies represent an official provision valid for all poor people. Consequently, many Roma families (especially the poorest who have been displaced and who are not aware of their rights) perceive these services as favours made to them for which they have to be grateful.

Mixing the general lack of power as well as lack of experience in civil society work with some aspirations of “recognition” and political gain, many Roma NGOs in Turkey are becoming accomplices of their own communities’ marginalization while attempting to overzealously side with those in power for personal gain. The gatekeepers’ livelihoods strategies and plans for sustainability are the vulnerability-inducing instruments for the communities they claim to represent. In Turkey, there is generally an unclear delimitation between the scope of work of some NGOs and their involvement in the activities of political parties<sup>117</sup>. Some associations, as well as some federations have been established or are regularly supported by different political parties. The Istanbul Roma Federation, for instance, is known for being established by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. The president and head of a network comprising more than 30 Roma / Dom / Lom and Abdal NGOs in Turkey, considers that, through these set-ups, “the Roma are sold to parties”. Roma leaders speak about presidents of such NGOs receiving payment for promises to gather groups of Roma to participate in political rallies or to mobilize them for mass meetings (e.g. the “Roma Openings” of the ruling party AKP in 2010 and 2015 or that of the opposition party CHP in 2011).

Roma gatekeepers – NGO leaders or self-proclaimed community leaders – are considered “vote collectors” for particular parties, since they receive fees or promises for future support in exchange for their “services”. They perform electoral mobilization in the Roma communities, simply directing them on whom to vote for and getting them to participate in political rallies, by distributing short-term aid before elections or conveying party leaders’ promises in exchange for votes. In this case, the exercise of voting becomes a powerful manipulation instrument of the

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<sup>117</sup> Recorded interview with N.A., skype, 2014

power holders instead of being an indicator for empowerment. This practice has been going on in the most vulnerable communities and especially in those affected by urban regeneration which found no alternatives for redress (e.g.: the case of families who did not / could not relocate from Küçükbakkalköy after demolition).

Particularly in the case of Küçükbakkalköy's former evicted and fragmented population, a Roma woman activist involved in the work of the AKP in the area was often pointed out as a frequent presence in the settlements, organizing people mostly for AKP's political rallies. Although some people do not seem to be clear about this Roma organiser's position, others defend her and say she is "Roma like us" or that she is "somebody [important] there [at the municipality]". She is perceived by different members of the Roma community both as a "politician" with potential influence at higher levels as well as someone "very dangerous". Contradictory information circulates about her, including the fact that she used to be a belly dancer, that in the past she reportedly worked for CHP, but after the Roma Opening in 2010 she started to work for the ruling party - AKP, and for the Istanbul Roma Federation. Moreover, some Roma leaders recall her behaviour in relation to the Turkish politicians and blame her lack of integrity and ethics that affects the manner in which the Roma are approached. A Roma man in Küçükbakkalköy narrated some of the events in which this Roma gatekeeper approached them during electoral campaigns:

We were around 25-30 people and we were a poor family – you know, we were phoned and told: Come, we'll give you money... for elections. She came and she had a speech for us, ... [then] she slipped some money onto children's hands, that kind of thing.

They sat us down, they brought artists to play for us.... until they got our votes...they tricked us again...we saw that they started to give food there...they took our ballot papers then they took us to the school<sup>118</sup>, where we gave our vote then signed.... - that's the truth.

She told us that IBB [Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality] would give us money. None of us received anything. The voting paper came and we voted [as she directed] but we did not get a Lira.

Others say that the copies of their IDs were taken by this Roma woman before elections, but they "did not see any benefit" from it. Some of the promised "benefits" regarded alternative housing for those who lived in improper shelter:

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<sup>118</sup> Schools are generally used as polling stations during elections

They said: “we will give you houses”. We heard that some have houses, some have prefabricated units, containers... [and, for this purpose, she] took our [ID] copies. Elections passed, however the promises she made were not fulfilled. Many of the people interviewed reacted angrily by saying that “this is nothing but trickery.

Politicians customarily interact with Roma mostly during electoral cycles and some Roma gatekeepers capitalize on this situation seeking individual benefits at the expense of most disadvantaged and excluded Roma. A Roma woman who lost her barrack to a fire and lived in a tent acknowledged that her family managed before elections, “but once the elections are over – it is over!”<sup>119</sup>

The Roma are transformed into “welcoming crowds of the politicians”, fact which diminishes their chances to be acknowledged as equal citizens. Different community leaders and NGO presidents render the Roma into a “helpless” disempowered mass prone to exploitation. Relevant for the above-mentioned case, Hammond argues (for different contexts) that “the poorest of the poor are easily manipulated and can even become, at least in part, complicit in their own process of invisibilization” (2008:4). Powerless in their lack of sources of subsistence and, as a result, ready to exploit any opportunity of immediate gain, some of the poorest Roma are becoming part of their own exploitation and exclusion, since their own rights are being traded for their immediate survival and for others’ long-term gain.

## **4.2. The Path from Vulnerability to Sustainability of Livelihoods**

### ***4.2.1. The Visible Vulnerability of the Roma***

Poverty is associated with vulnerability, with risks determined by social, political and economic context and linked to the limited capacity of people to manage shocks. Vulnerability represents the external environment that impacts people’s assets (Devereux 2001) and which is outside their control. According to the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, as conceptualized by Chambers and Conway (1992), Carney (1999) and expanded further by different development agencies like DFID (2001), what makes a household vulnerable are the trends (demographic, resource related, technological and governance), the shocks (human, livestock or

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<sup>119</sup> Interviews, 2014, Küçükbakkalköy / Istanbul

crop related, natural or economic shocks, conflicts) and seasonality (of employment opportunities, production, prices, health) (Meikle, Ramasut & Walker 2001; DFID 2001).

Changes in political trends at national or local level affect as well the livelihoods of the poor, including the poor Roma. In Turkey, the society in general is greatly politicized and Roma in particular have been known for being electorally exploited by politicians who attract them with gifts (in form of food items, coal or firewood for the winter) or just promises of housing and welfare. Notwithstanding, when political leadership elected is not the one voted for by the Roma in a certain neighbourhoods, repercussions occur on the delivery of services to the community or on individuals' access to welfare (e.g.: certain services provision delayed, demands for welfare rejected etc.).

The main shocks in the lives of the Roma targeted by this research are those related to loss of housing, displacement and relocation. Urban regeneration projects involving demolitions improperly prepared and sometimes unannounced are both physical and psychological shocks of which those affected have hard times to find redress from. Evictions related to urban transformation affect the livelihoods of many urban residents and have wider ranging livelihoods impacts than just the loss of housing. Moving to different locations, evicted households lose access to livelihood resources. Moreover, the disruption of communities endangers their social networks and capital, increasing their vulnerability (Meikle, Ramasut & Walker 2001:15).

Shocks can have significant negative impacts on people's livelihoods if capacity to adapt and coping strategies are weak. Lack of preparedness to face shocks damages further poor Roma's living conditions. The inhabitants of both Küçükbakkalköy and the "200 Housing" scheme experienced repeated shocks which affected and continues to affect their livelihoods: the demolitions of their houses as part of the urban regeneration projects, the impact of relocation, the loss of income due to sudden displacement and the new economic demands of the relocation both in case of housing alternatives offered by the government (apartment blocks charging monthly payments that the households were not able to sustain). Young generations have had educational and developmental cycles disrupted, by being forced to abandon school (due to relocation, loss of "address" / registration, lack of resources and proper living conditions etc.). A 16-year-old boy in Ataşehir / Küçükbakkalköy recalls the day his home was demolished:

Seven or eight years ago our life changed. ... One day, I came from school and there was no house: “Where is the house?” I said. There was not even rubble. My friends are gone, my life is on the streets – we became charlatans. What do we do? We sniff bali<sup>120</sup>, bonzai...<sup>121</sup>.

Vulnerability or livelihood insecurity resulting from these types of shocks is a constant reality for many poor Roma in Turkey. Some lived in uncertainty, in houses that were planned for demolition, in wooden and tarpaulin-improvised shelter or in tents. At times, people were sent from one place to another and obliged to “rebuild” their improvised “homes” after each “visit” of the police or municipal guards. A 30-year-old Roma man living in a shack after the displacement in Küçükbakkalköy recalls some of these visits:

People from the municipality came several times and destroyed the barracks and we put them back; when they do that, they also throw away our things or just take them... We had our IDs inside. I begged the men. They said “no” and, on top of it, kicked us ... The Municipality comes after we settle and destroys everything and throws even our beds outside.

Those suddenly left without any adequate housing alternative were obliged to improvise shelter at the outskirts of neighbourhoods. People in these temporary / illegal settlements, which have appeared since the gradual demolition of Küçükbakkalköy’s Roma neighbourhood, stated that they could not send their children to school since they did not have an official address to register the children to the right establishment, no money for uniforms or supplies as well as no basic sanitation or proper living space for children who need to study. Instead, children became “helpers” of their families, joining them in searching for scrap or begging for money or food. Consequentially, they form another link in the vicious chain of their household poverty.

One important vulnerability trait of the Roma households is related to the lack of wage protection and uncertainty of employment. The fact that the poor, including the poor Roma tend to be involved mostly in economic activities in the informal market it often means that they would earn lower amounts of money and have no social benefits. In this context, the members of a household will have to

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<sup>120</sup> Bali / bally (thinner-glue) is a synthetic, cheap, drug sniffed after being applied on the bottom of a plastic or paper bag.

<sup>121</sup> Bonzai (spice) is a synthetic cannabinoid.

work longer hours and to involve children as well in their work, fact which will expose children to different dangers, besides of obstructing them to follow a proper path that involves staying in school and getting an education. From this point of view, a livelihood strategy that involves the work exploitation of children is considered also to be a violation of human rights to which the family is accomplice. Developed either out of desperation or out of customary norms of the community, this nevertheless aims to help them survive. A Roma woman whose family moved to Istanbul for work during her childhood recalls that as soon as she dropped out of school, she and her cousins of the same age “had to start earning for the family”. Their parents taught her how to use a horse and carriage, and sent her to “the city” to collect paper and metal scrap, to sell it and come back home with money:

We were two girls [herself and her cousin D.] who did not get out of that neighbourhood since we came to live there and we did not know where to go, but we had to find something; if we could not steal from somewhere, we had to do this.

We went to a construction site with our horse and carriage. But while trying to steal some metal bars, someone started to shout at us and we ran like crazy frightened. We were just over 10 years old, but everyone in the family blamed us for not being able to earn anything.

D. got very good at begging. I got better at collecting paper scrap. Everyone was giving me a lot of paper and cardboard. One day, while roaming around Şirinevler, Ataköy and Yenibosna in Istanbul, with the horse and carriage, the owner of a factory told me that I should not search around anymore because it was dangerous. Instead, he would speak with the guard to bring me every day the paper disposed from the factory, so I could collect it and go directly home. For two years I managed to earn money from that factory, because someone took pity on me.

Similar stories are frequent in the Roma neighbourhoods around Istanbul nowadays. It is considered that livelihoods are sustainable “when they can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks”, as well as when they manage to enhance capabilities and assets of households (Chambers & Conway 1992). However, the practices introduced by the urban regeneration projects, which have increased the vulnerability of the poorest inhabitants in the major urban settlements of Turkey, disrupt and displace households and have drastic effects on the security and sustainability of people’s livelihoods.

Seasonality can be both an opportunity to secure livelihoods as well as a vulnerability trait. Many Roma work as seasonal agricultural workers, some moving with their entire families in other areas of Turkey to collect cotton, pick vegetables or different nuts for non-Roma farmers. Although this signifies that the family might get the financial mean to sustain themselves through the cold seasons, the months of work in agriculture means disruption of education for the children, unsafe living conditions (in improvised shelter around the farms that lack basic hygiene conditions), lack of health coverage, and sometimes the insecurity of being let go without notice. Different families report events in which they spent their savings to pay for the transfer of their entire family to another province where they were told that they would be paid for their manual work, but at arrival they were told that others came before them and that they had to go back. A Roma family from Samsun had to sleep for days in a metro station in Ankara and beg for money and food before being able to afford the tickets to get back home after being turned back by a farmer who promised them work. For this family, that was the work opportunity of the season that they had lost, and their lack of the anticipated income became a new strain on the vulnerability of the household. For many Roma who are not employed in the formal sector, seasonal work can be the only chance to accumulate assets for the survival of the household. Roma from Samsun as those from other areas targeted by tourism, use the opportunity of the summer vacationers or summer Sunday fairs to sell balloons, roasted sunflower seeds, fresh flowers or on-the-spot-handmade candy. Some balloon sellers do this job on an itinerant manner, travelling in the area without coming back until they have sold the entire stock of balloons. While heads of households do these jobs, women either stay at home or pursue different similar activities, which do not bring security on the long run but manage to ensure a temporary relief for the livelihood. The more privileged families, who own horses, use them to transport tourists and locals in decorated carriages for short rides on the seashore in the evenings. Roma musicians also, individually or in groups, try their luck around groups of picnickers or in front of restaurants, singing traditional songs on demand. However, besides the fact that these seasonal opportunities are valid only during summer, there is great competition for these jobs and local administrations started to regulate more and more such activities, requiring registration and license and sometimes even a share of the profits, fact which diminishes the chances of less connected and poorer Roma to compete in this.



People's livelihoods can be affected in different degrees by a wide range of transforming structures and processes that include institutions and organizations (also levels of government and private sector bodies), practices, policies, legislation, culture etc. that shape the livelihoods and determine their access to different types of capital or assets. These structures and processes can have an impact on the vulnerability of a household as well as on its livelihoods strategies and outcomes.

Securing livelihoods is possible for households that have access to adequate resources and are able to perform income-generating activities, alongside being able to mitigate risks, meet contingencies and ease shocks. People with sustainable livelihoods are able to strategize and plan for the future and have a range of choices through which they can reasonably expect to be able to redress after potential shocks. Securing livelihoods is a "dynamic process in which people combine activities to meet their various needs at different times and on different geographic or economical levels" (DSG 2002:8).

Successful outcomes of livelihood strategies ultimately bring more income, "increased well-being (e.g. non material goods, self-esteem, health status, access to services, sense of inclusion), reduced vulnerability (e.g. better resilience through increase in asset status), improved food security (e.g. increase in financial capital in order to buy food), and a more sustainable use of natural resources (e.g. appropriate property rights)" (DSG 2002:9). Nevertheless, positive outcomes / better livelihoods outcomes signify a better chance to improve capabilities and better access to resources and opportunities.

#### ***4.2.2. Livelihood Assets of the Poor***

The literature on sustainable livelihoods reflects upon the resources or assets that individuals need to have access to and use in order to survive. Human, physical, social, financial and natural capitals represent livelihoods assets which help a household to develop strategies to achieve sustainable outcomes like better income, better food security, well-being, better use of natural resources and overall decreased vulnerability. The livelihoods assets or capitals that people can use for their livelihoods strategies represent their strengths. However, the existence of assets is not sufficient to promote livelihoods, the key being the accessibility that people and households can have to these assets.

The *human capital* represents the skills and abilities, knowledge, level of education, capacity to work, good health etc. that give the individuals in a household the ability to pursue different livelihood strategies. Capabilities, such as physical capacity, knowledge and skills, are assets owned by the individuals. Access to education, level of education and acquired skills provide poor people with the opportunity to improve the value of their “human capital”. One of the major needs recognized by the Roma as well as by the policy-makers refer to education. The same way in which the health of the poor, poor Roma included, is influenced by different social determinants (including level of education and health literacy, work, income, environment, housing etc.), accessing education, staying in school and benefitting further from this process depends on a number of other assets and opportunities. Moreover, they depend on the capacity to cope with the vulnerability caused by shocks and transformations determined by some power structures or processes.

The *social capital* refers to having access to social resources like formal or informal support groups or networks (informal safety nets amongst the poor), having access to information, relationships of trust, access to various institutions as well as capacity to influence or power. An important aspect of being able to access social networks is to further benefit from information about opportunities and possible risks. Moreover, poor individuals and households can benefit from information about casual labour markets and other opportunities. Their membership to different formal or informal structures can help them survive (NGOs, religious establishments and groups / sects), as it is recognized that “people without social connections are the most impoverished of all” (Beall & Nazneed 1999:19). The Roma tend to have strong social ties with their extended families or with their Roma neighbours and less connection with the non-Roma. Although the reliance on their families or other people in the settlement constitutes a coping strategy, this is in itself not sustainable having in mind the, often similar, poor, disempowered condition of those approached households.

Having *financial capital* means having savings and stocks (livestock or other valuables, like jewellery), the ability to acquire credit or regular remittances or pensions. The financial capital is the most versatile as it can be converted in other types of capital or directly used as cash for purchasing goods. Urban areas are spaces where everything is commodified and therefore financial means are needed for livelihoods to survive. It is often the case that especially the poor who are not

engaged on the formal work sector do not have bank accounts or cash savings. In this regard, the lack of accessibility to affordable credit is also one important barrier in reducing the likelihood of severe indebtedness of the poor Roma. The traditional transfer of jewellery at marriage (golden coins or bracelets etc.), amount and value of which depend on the status and means of the families of a couple, represents a form of contribution to the assets of the household. The golden bracelets gifted to the bride during the wedding ceremony can be sold one by one any time the family encounters difficulties. Besides money and gold, in various amounts, better off families provide newlyweds also with basic home furnishing (domestic appliances). However, in the absence of long-term job prospects, these remain just ephemeral means of survival for the livelihood. Moreover, due to the fact that poor unskilled Roma have fewer chances to get enrolled in the formal job sector, they also do not get to have social benefits and ultimately a permanent income for the old age in the form of pension.

The *physical capital* comprises assets that refer to having adequate access to (basic) infrastructure (affordable energy and transport, secure shelter, adequate water supply and sanitation) and equipment to produce goods. Poor physical capital or lack of infrastructure, including housing, affect negatively the chance to access and continue education, the access to health services and income generation. Access to education and health facilities gives poor households the opportunity to improve their human capital and is often the justification for migration. Housing is also one of the major assets that the urban poor use both to shelter the family as well as for production (renting room, using the space for work and depositing goods). Shocks related to loss of shelter (evictions, displacement, relocation), like in the case of the poor Roma households affected by the urban regeneration projects in the major cities of Turkey, have long-term impact on their livelihoods assets, strategies and outcomes.

The *natural capital* refers to resources stocks like land, water and other environmental resources (Chambers & Conway 1992). The Roma are historically notorious for not owning much of natural capital (land, water, forests etc.), however sometimes their livelihoods can benefit from natural resources. Moreover, even if not owning generally land, they can benefit from the work in agriculture they perform for farmers or from further commercializing different agricultural produce on the market. Also, despite the fact that making use of the land for livestock (although mostly illegally) can be also important asset for some poor Turkish Roma living at

the outskirts or in some of the *gecekondu* neighbourhoods, this is less significant in inner urban settings. They can keep their horses, carriages or other vehicles and tools or even use the land for small patches of gardening. Nevertheless, the environment of the unclean / contaminated land and water streams can be also exploited by the poor as a survival mechanism, regardless of its negative health impact<sup>122</sup>. However, although this might help the survival of the household on short term, in the absence of diversified livelihood solutions, it will affect its health and sustainability on the long run.

The sustainable livelihoods framework conceptualized by Chambers & Conway (1991) approaches the livelihoods strategies of a household from the perspective of transforming structures (levels of government, private sector, civil society etc.) and processes (laws, policies, culture, institutions) that have an influence on livelihoods assets. Moreover, it shows how vulnerability is determined by uneven access to livelihood resources and inability to cope with shocks that are determined by the human, economic, political or physical environment.

#### ***4.2.3. Framing the Sustainability Prospects of Roma Livelihoods***

Chambers & Conway describe a livelihood as “a means of gaining a living”, containing the “adequate stocks and flows of food and cash to meet basic needs” of a household (1991:5). The authors further speak about the direct forms of inter-generational sustainability of a household, which refer to “inheritance of assets and / or skills”, or indirect ones that “can be achieved through children moving to other places or into other occupations by which they create other livelihoods” (Chambers & Conway 1991:12).

Generally, the Roma in Turkey seem to have focused more on preserving their livelihoods than fighting for their ethnic identity. A combination of resources and capabilities<sup>123</sup> is required for a household’s members to be able to secure their livelihood and no single ability seems to be sufficient to produce the desired

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<sup>122</sup> E.g. The Roma living and exploiting the resources around the coal processing factory in Tekkeköy / Samsun / Turkey, the Roma in Cluj / Romania living on the Pata Rat garbage dumpsite, the Roma in the Mitrovica refugee camps located around the unused heavy metals mines where they were exposed to environmental lead poisoning etc.

<sup>123</sup> Narayan & Petesch listed the crucial assets and capabilities of poor people as being: material assets, bodily health, bodily integrity, emotional integrity, respect and dignity, social belonging, cultural identity, imagination, information, and education, organizational capacity, political representation and accountability (2002:463)

outcomes on its own. With traditional crafts losing relevance on the liberal market, with non-transferable skills and facing continuous discrimination, the Roma have had limited venues to access resources for development. Experts consider that a realistic understanding of people's strengths is crucial in assessing how they could "convert their assets into positive livelihood outcomes" (Bebbington 1999 cited in DSG 2002:8). From this perspective, the lack of focus on and understanding of their capabilities has kept the Roma in obscurity and unaccounted for in the development patterns of the communities they inhabit.

A livelihood is considered socially sustainable when it can "cope with and recover from stress and shocks, and provide for future generations" (DSG 2002:i). In this case, sustainability "connotes self-sufficiency" and a reference to "long-term self-restraint and self-reliance" (DSG 2002:5). In order to be sustainable, livelihoods should have the capabilities to adapt to changes, like in the case of the Roma performing traditional occupations to be able to adapt to a competitive market. These capabilities would include also the ability to find and make use of livelihood opportunities, including "gaining access to and using services and information, exercising foresight, experimenting and innovating, competing and collaborating with others, and exploiting new conditions and resources" (DSG 2002:4). Stressing on capabilities of people, their capacity to make choices and the role of agency, Carney argued that the capacity of people to sustain their livelihoods depends on "the availability and accessibility of options which are ecological, economic and political and which are predicated on equity, ownership of resources and participatory decision making" (1999:4). The condition of Roma targeted by this research illustrates lack of adequate assets, weak capabilities and an inter-generational transfer of vulnerability, as conceptualized in the theoretical framework of this research (section 1.2).

#### *4.2.3.1. Income Generation in Urban Settings – Exploiting Limited Assets for Survival*

Although the poverty of the Roma has multiple structural causes, one deteriorating asset of their livelihoods is the vocational skill, which was passed from a generation to another as a strategic asset for their survival. Alongside market diversification and development, the traditional crafts of the Roma no longer find

sustainable markets and demand, and are no longer able to support the livelihoods of Roma households. Development for certain sections of the society means increased vulnerability and weakness of livelihoods strategies for others. A young Roma whose family moved to Istanbul in late 1980s in search for better means of subsistence reflected upon the loss of relevance of the traditional occupation in the context of urban setting and of its dignified significance in connecting them with the rest of the society and in sustaining their living:

Our people were basket makers and it was through this craft that they made connection with the rest of the society. However, when they came to Istanbul, they faced both poverty and rejection, because they had to do the most inferior jobs the rest of the people would not do. We had to collect scrap [Tr. *hurda*]. And that got us deeper into poverty... And while doing this, we would not connect in any way with the others. Because we only collected the garbage the others disposed of. The society did not seem to need us in any other way. In the past, when [our family] used to make and sell baskets – people needed us. They had to buy our baskets. And like this, there was a relationship established between us. Now, if people would refuse to let us remove their garbage – we would have no other option but to stay hungry.

Some Roma, and especially the Dom communities in Southeast Turkey, continue to perform some traditional crafts they learned from their ancestors, alongside other unregulated and odd jobs. Although some of these jobs have lost viability and effectiveness, they are still demanded (although in limited extent) by some of those who cannot afford or who are not accustomed to the official regulated medical services. For example, during the research, I met some scrap collectors who were performing also the “profession” of traditional “dentistry”<sup>124</sup> or an ironsmith who was also collecting scrap paper outside his shop. The same thing has started to happen in the field of music and entertainment, which used to be the most in-demand sector of traditional performance in Turkey. Roma musicians (mostly drum and shrill pipe players) [*davul zurna*] cannot find engagements anymore due to the fact that the entertainment market (weddings, restaurant gatherings and other various celebrations) is saturated or just that there is less demand for traditional performers. In some cases, street musicians and ad-hoc entertainers (during summer time, mostly,

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<sup>124</sup> This is in fact a rather basic form of dentistry, performed as itinerant craft and including simple interventions, manufacturing and installing dental prosthesis etc. Individuals performing such jobs have been encountered in Southeast Turkey – performed by the Dom and in Istanbul - by a Kurdish Alevi elderly who still has old clients in different areas of the city and an improvised lab at home in where he makes the artificial dentures.

in public places, at seaside, parks, picnic places etc.) have started also to be “regulated” by municipalities, diminishing their chances for sufficient daily gain. They are requested to register, get a licence and pay taxes. In their attempt to reduce the unregulated economic sector, the Turkish authorities target sometimes also the Roma flower sellers with no selling permit, confiscating their goods and fining them. Moreover, scrap collectors are reported to have their carts or vehicles confiscated and fined with amounts they struggle to pay or are simply put in jail after repeated offence. Having no other alternative for work in a metropolis like Istanbul, one Roma man living in the rubble of his former house in Küçükbakkalköy explained disappointedly:

When they take away my cart, they hurt my children, not me, because with this cart I raise five children.

What many Roma do to survive is to exploit “degraded resources” that can sometimes present “immense livelihood potential” (Chambers & Conway 1991:16). Some poor urban Roma collect from garbage and waste sites and recycle different materials. Some start collecting metal and paper scrap and recycling garbage using manual carts for transport through the city, others make use of horse and carriages or cars and use multiple members of the family for help. Others develop further the “business” by lending vans for these purposes or managing collection points that play the role of intermediaries between collectors and other operators. Due to the fact that sometimes this is the only income generation activity of a household, the Roma scrap collectors began to complain that the municipalities have started to collect and recycle the garbage themselves or make it impossible for Roma to have access to it. That because some district municipalities have replaced the old open garbage bins with ones that are suitable for product separation / recycling and which are impossible to open. Moreover, the shops and big stores seem not to throw goods / waste anymore, including packaging materials and recycle everything internally. In this case, according to a scrap collector in Küçükbakkalköy, the Roma have to travel and spend more time in search for metal scrap and paper further away in the city:

We earn depending on the day<sup>125</sup>; depending on how much we wander... Sometimes we can gather for up to 20 Lira (approx. 7 Euro / day), sometimes

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<sup>125</sup> A research study conducted in five provinces of Turkey on Roma / Dom / Lom / Abdal groups, indicated that 51% of all family representatives responding acquired only between 500 and 900 TL (between approx.164 and 294 Euro) per month by performing different jobs. The study showed also

15 (approx. 5 Euro / day), sometimes 50 (approx. 18 Euro / day), depending on how we go out.

Other degraded resources used by the Roma to cope in urban settings are marginal, eroded, waterlogged or flooded land or dumpsites that newcomers (either coming from other areas of Turkey or finding refuge after being evicted from their old neighbourhoods) use to install temporary shelters and to deposit the materials they collect or the products meant to be sold further in the city. Although some of these sites constitute a threat to the health of the settlers, they represent a temporary asset to exploit in the context in which there is no competition for its ownership. For example, the Roma in the small *gecekondu* settlement of Tekkeköy in Samsun live in the vicinity of a coal-processing factory that affects greatly their health. However, although complaining about these conditions, Roma families continued to live there for decades because they consider that the place would not be claimed by somebody else due to its conditions and they would potentially not face displacement. These strategies for survival used by the Roma indicate what Chambers & Conway argued about the fact that some people's acts might be "determined by the social, economic and ecological environment in which they find themselves" and therefore they would tend to "improvise livelihoods with degrees of desperation" (1991:6).

Occupational flexibility is an important coping mechanism, and nomadism and sedentarism have been used, over time, as alternative strategies for negotiating economic and social niches (Silverman 1979:306; Salo & Salo 1977:92) also by different Roma groups in Turkey. However, the niches traditionally occupied by the Roma have brought them into obscure corners of employability. Gmelch argued generally that the "artisan, trader, and entertainer minorities are typically regarded as marginal, as peripheral occupational subcultures providing petty services" (1986:310). In this regard, those Roma who do not find niches of survival and development from regulated employment use rather versatile but altogether fragile

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that the Lom in Artvin had the highest income among all groups: 5% of the 84 people responding said that they gained 2000 TL (approx. 654 Euro) or more per month, 21.4% earning between 1000 and 1999 TL (equivalent of approx. 327 and 654 Euro) and only 9.5% less than 163 Euro/month. On the other hand, the Abdal from Gaziantep declared in proportion of 87.3% that they earned, as a household, only the equivalent of up to 163 Euro/month, keeping in mind that the Abdals in Gaziantep had the households with the most numerous family members among all researched groups. Therefore, in a family of approximately 7 members, a person would receive around 23 Euro/month, having to subsist with up to 8 Cents a day, fact affecting their life quality in the most negative manner (ZDA - Oprişan 2014:15).



methods of coping: they occupy informal and unregulated market positions, identify uncovered or unwanted means of income generation such as performance of odd jobs, scrap or waste collection. They tend to engage all family members in scrap collection activities and transform their shelters into recycling hubs<sup>126</sup>. Moreover, they sometimes use the environment of their marginal settlements to launch into different types of profitable delinquency (e.g.: selling drugs, stealing etc.) or into arguably productive activities of mendacity. All these “choices” situate them deeper within a grey area of vulnerability where the place of a potential sustainability is taken by a struggle for survival. Moreover, although these jobs help families to survive in the short term, they can also be disempowering mostly through the perceptions other people have of them, fact which places the Roma in a status of inferiority. In the same time, the “dirty” jobs nobody else wants and the continuous search for means of survival has an impact on the self-esteem of the poor, hence the poor Roma.

Beall & Kanji argue that in urban areas, “where there is almost exclusive dependence on cash income, livelihoods depend on access to employment and income earning opportunities” (1999:15). With limited opportunities for employment, the Roma take up weak livelihood strategies that do not have the potential to lift them out of poverty. Many of the families covered by this research are living under the officially recognized poverty and hunger thresholds<sup>127</sup>. Access to the grey economy, with transactions unaccounted for in official statistics, continues to be a niche occupied by a great range of disadvantaged populations in Turkey, including Roma, and remains vital for their survival.

A study conducted in 2014 shows that obtaining any form of income in the past year (2013-2014) has been a challenge for 73.03% of the Roma / Dom / Lom and Abdal (ZDA - Oprüşan 2014)<sup>128</sup>. A Roma man in former Küçükbakkalköy said

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<sup>126</sup> A great number of the families left behind on the ruins of former Roma neighbourhood in Küçükbakkalköy are involved in garbage recycling. They collect paper, glass, plastic and metal and sell them to the recycling centres or to intermediaries. There is a practice among them that especially the paper scrap and cardboard is soaked with water to weight more, since they recognize that those who buy from them are cheating as well on the prices. (Field notes, Küçükbakkalköy / Istanbul, 2013)

<sup>127</sup> According to TÜRK-İŞ (Turkish Confederation of Labour Unions), the poverty line is estimated for a family of 4 during the month of January 2014 at 3580.35 TL (approx. 1170 Euro / month), while hunger threshold was estimated at 1099.7 TL / month (approx. 360 Euro). (TÜRK-İŞ 2014)

<sup>128</sup> The same study points out an alarming degree of deprivation and insecurity which seems to have reached unsettling heights especially in the case of the Dom in Diyarbakır with 98% of respondents not being able to find jobs to generate income in the past month, closely followed by the Abdal in Gaziantep with 96% similar answers.

that he and his family wanted jobs and “nothing else”: “I want a clean job so my family can be clean”. Apparently, the municipality has been promising in numerous occasions to give them jobs, but nothing happened (by the time of the interview in May 2014):

They tell us: come tomorrow, come the day after tomorrow; they trick us. We’ll take you as sweeper, or we’ll take you behind the camera board [security desk]. Tomorrow, one week, two weeks, three weeks, they are just dodging us... I did not go again for a while, since the elections. I started to be ashamed. I am continuously going there [at the municipality to ask for work] and I am continuously distressed.

There is an omnipresent demeaning statement, in Turkey and other countries, about the Roma that they like to “live by the day”. Sometimes this stereotype is perpetuated by the statements the Roma themselves make, showing how stereotypes are internalized and carried upon and how one can often accept his “inferiority” if systematically disrespected. A 2011 survey conducted by Samsun Governorate in Yavuz Selim and “200 Houses” neighbourhoods included the statement of a 57 years old man according to which the Roma would “think short term, they would not think ahead, would live by the day, with scarce income”, being overall “people that would not even dream of other life standard” (Samsun Governorate 2011:57). In fact, the stereotypical label on the Roma and other similar groups regarding the tendency to “live by the day” is unfortunately a chronic incapacity to secure daily subsistence. On the other hand, there are some Roma who “prefer” to take the daily jobs and do not venture for a more “stable” job with monthly payments since they are not fully aware of what such a commitment would mean and fear that until they would receive their salary at the end of the month their family will not be able to survive. Lack of local resources, lack of (competitive) skills of the Roma / Dom / Lom / Abdal, alongside the devaluation of traditional occupations<sup>129</sup>, as well as longstanding exclusion and discrimination place these groups at the margins of society which force them to fight uncertain battles for survival on daily basis.

However, numerous examples in the communities targeted by this research show how having a job and acquiring income for the household is perceived as a

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<sup>129</sup> The formerly nomad groups of Roma and Abdal used to make a sort of “mirrored baskets” [Tr. *aynalı sepet*], copper plates [Tr. *bakır tasları*] or leather shoes and leather horse harness that they do not make anymore since they are not profitable to sell: “there was a culture and viable occupations during the nomad life; now there is no culture left but poverty; we do not have something specific of our own” (E.A., Interviews, Istanbul 2014).

source of pride and a way of gaining respectability<sup>130</sup> in the community and society at large. The Roma in the community repeat the praises they say the women in Yavuz Selim neighbourhood receive for the work they do as cleaners and charwomen in the houses of the richer non-Roma in Samsun. The fact that they are considered “clean and trustworthy” enough to work in those houses (owned by judges, lawyers, public servants etc.) gives a sense of pride to the entire Roma neighbourhood. Being put to repeated “tests” of trust by their employers is perceived as a normal practice and almost desired, since their demonstrated good behaviour and good work will reflect on the collective reputation of the entire community. The women are aware of the fact, for instance, that when they first go to work in other people’s houses, the “homeowners put money under carpets or in plain sight to see if the Gypsy woman who comes to the house is a thief or not” (Samsun Governorate 2011:69). The pride in earning the trust of the well-off respected *gadge* [Romanes for “non-Roma”] in town is expressed every time inquiries about the availability of employment and the state of the neighbourhood come up<sup>131</sup>. The “respectability” of the few Roma who are employed in the formal sector is recognized by others, their “professionalism and trustworthiness” is said to secure their employment and sustain their households in the longer run. These examples are given with pride, since they demonstrate that the Yavuz Selim Roma community is gaining a better status in the eyes of the others.

The same cannot be said however about the Roma in the nearby “200 Houses” scheme. Their relocation has disrupted their livelihoods and, even if they were moved into apparently better homes, some became poorer and have not managed to “fit in”. Both representatives of the public authorities in the area as well as Roma from nearby communities judge the Roma in “200 Houses” for being “rougher” and say “they remained uncultured” and have not managed “to enter into” the [mainstream] society (Samsun Governorate 2011:73). Although, in reality, some

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<sup>130</sup> In a blog post of 2014, Metin Özbaskıcı, a Roma community leader, gave an account of the situation of the former “*teneke mahalesi*” / the demolished *gecekondu* of Samsun from where people were moved to “200 Houses”: “The people used to start work early morning and come back in the afternoon in the neighbourhood where they felt comfortable and happy. Stomach full neighbourhood people gleamed with joy. The neighbourhood was like a marketplace; itinerant meatball seller, itinerant kebab seller, sweets seller, *sahlep* seller – they were all selling very cheap”. According to him, the Roma used to be prosperous during the time when the harbour was functioning; they used to be porters, shoe shiners, coachmen, second hand cloths sellers, musicians etc. Good income also came from the work on the Tabaco fields” (<http://cingeneyiz.blogspot.fr/2014/03/metin-ozbaski-samsun-teneke-mahallesi.html>)

<sup>131</sup> Field notes, Samsun 2013

of the inhabitants of “200 Houses” pursued small entrepreneurial activities (e.g. selling kebab in an improvised shop in the neighbourhood) and others perform seasonal or temporary jobs in the surrounding areas, many still depend on the regular assistance of the municipality which continues to manage the housing scheme.

General economic difficulties of the society drive people towards the informal sector and unregulated occupations. Widespread informal employment in Turkey is explained as being highly associated with lower levels of education, the small share of the manufacturing sector, and the large number of micro-scale firms (Organizedergi 2015). According to the Centre for Social Policy Research of the TOBB University of Economics and Technology in Turkey, the “high rates of unemployment mean stiffer competition for jobs and hence, force more people to consider unregistered employment as a viable alternative” (Tokyay 2014). However, a research conducted through TÜSIAD - Turkish Industry and Business Association shows that, due to certain policies providing tax reduction incentives for employers as well as due to the provisions of the 2011-2013 Strategic Action Plan for Combating Informal Economy, the informal sector's share of employment seems, in fact, to have decreased from 50.6% in 2000 to 43.3% in 2010 (Tansel 2012:89).

#### *4.2.3.2. Housing as a Dignifying Capital*

Housing is a physical and an economic asset, “a commodity that has market value and can accommodate income-generating activities” (Beall & Kanji 1999:15). Besides providing safe and secure space for people, housing represents also an element of social honour, and from this point of view it has social value. Without housing, people would have difficulties in fully participating in the society, making it both a basic right as well as a social asset.

Poor people tend to live segregated, sometimes in areas of deprivation, due to the fact that they have less choices in the housing market due to low income, lack of entitlement to social housing or due to discrimination (Bolt & van Kempen 2002; Verbundpartner 2005). However, Harrison & Philips (2003) argue that ethnic clustering / segregation can somehow facilitate the development of community infrastructure and social support networks that can, at their turn, enable people to feel a sense of belonging.

Regardless of the vulnerability implied, living in the clustered slums of the *gecekondu* unregulated settlements, which grew dramatically in Turkey after the 1980s, meant for the Roma and for other “social underdogs” that they had a means to survive. It is estimated that the informal settlements of *gecekondu* counted almost 60% of the total housing in Istanbul, by 2000 (Yalcintan & Erbaş 2003:94). This space has allowed for relational coping mechanisms, since families were able to secure daily subsistence through immediate or extended family support, loans from relatives and neighbours, credit from local shops etc. “Thank God for neighbours”, declared a former inhabitant of Küçükbakkalköy when asked how they used to cope before eviction. Many people recognize the positive in the fact that they did not have to pay rent or any house instalments when they lived in the older *gecekondu*:

It was really good ... it was relaxed, it was our place, nobody chased us, nobody was telling us “stand-up and leave”.<sup>132</sup>

The majority of people interviewed who used to live in Küçükbakkalköy, as well as those who moved in the “200 Houses” scheme in Samsun claim they used to have a better life before, when they lived in the *gecekondu*:

It was better before. ... We still went to collect from garbage but we managed to put 60, or 50, or 100, or 30 Lira in our pockets, because we did not have to spend it on rent, money for water, for electricity ... but here, since we started to pay rent, believe me, we cannot do anything.

Further on, the Roma who had property rights over their houses or plots of land in the *gecekondu* received compensations that, even though were much below the market price, enabled them to buy homes elsewhere and try to restore their livelihoods. Difficulties have started to arise, however, when multiple related families who used to live in the same multi-storied *gecekondu* houses (for which they had title deeds) received payment from the state only for the total square meters of the ground level of the old house and not for the surface of all the rooms situated on the upper floors. In this situation, the money received was not sufficient to pay for the necessary space in new apartments that were supposed to accommodate the entire displaced household. This “transaction” drained resources and left families in greater financial difficulty. Similarly, those who have been living for decades in houses built

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<sup>132</sup> Interviews, “200 Houses” scheme, Samsun, 2014

illegally on land belonging to the municipality or the Treasury had the houses demolished<sup>133</sup> and left without any alternative or hope. When people are completely left out of the housing projects, they become “the weakest group among the squatter residents”, being “unable to receive compensation or to be transferred to another place in case of reformation or renewal” (Davis 2010:61-62 cited in İçli & Özçelik 2012:7). A Roma man in Küçükbakkalköy said that their house of 5 or 6 rooms for which they did not have title deeds, but used to pay taxes for was demolished and “the state” immediately “threw” them out. Another Roma man from the same neighbourhood claimed that “nobody helped” after they have been evicted and that he believed they will stay “in tents until death”:

We cannot pay rent, therefore we cannot look for apartments. What can we do? [Use] money for stomach or money for rent?

In the case of the Roma relocated in the “200 Housing” scheme in Samsun, although their shelter needs have been addressed by the authorities, their livelihoods have suffered a very significant shock and many got into long-term debts they could not cope with. Household members have not been able to maintain the income generating activities they used to perform in their old neighbourhoods. The sources of income that bound households together were indeterminately obstructed, displaced or relocated Roma households being far from able to develop other viable livelihood strategies. Both their settlements and living conditions, as well as the economic environment changed. Some of the people in the “200 Houses Scheme” used to work at an alcohol factory (Tekel) when they lived in the former *gecekondu* neighbourhood. This used to generate steady income and people acknowledged that it was a way of “safeguarding generations”, as the savings from a generation managed to support the other. Employment in the factory was regulated and the people were able to retire and to be covered by pension and social security. Harvesting tobacco in the villages was also one activity generating income that people could obtain on seasonal basis. However, regulated, formal sector employment opportunities became scarce, as are the agricultural work opportunities in the villages of the region.

Similarly, in former Küçükbakkalköy of Istanbul, many Roma men used to work in a glass-making factory in Tuzla (a district in the Southern area, outside

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<sup>133</sup> Field Notes Küçükbakkalköy 2014

Istanbul). One of the present community leaders used to be an employee of the factory who used to find manpower for the factory among the skilled or unskilled Roma in the former neighbourhood. The factory closed at the same time when the neighbourhood started to be demolished, in 2006, and these two major shocks increased the vulnerability of the Roma.

#### *4.2.3.3. The Roma in the Framework of the Social Welfare System in Turkey*

Turkey has been experiencing a mixture of applying welfare state principles and an accelerated implementation of neoliberal policies. In an interview for Research Turkey (2014), the Turkish sociologist Ayşe Buğra described this situation as merging of neo-liberalism with social conservatism. Welfare in the form of aid provision by the local administration existed during previous governments as well. However it gained in significance during the AKP ruling. In comparison with other former administrations, the municipal administrations of AKP across Turkey have been providing aid to the urban poor in the form of food, clothes and coal, enforcing a welfare-oriented approach and creating themselves a favourable image in the eyes of the public. This aid responds to immediate needs and its role in the subsistence of the household of the poorest Roma has gained importance to such an extent that a family which received bags of coal for the winter may be more likely to support and vote for the AKP and Erdoğan, overlooking the fact that the same administration has left them homeless, demolishing their houses and leaving them to live in barracks, a low point in their lives which they had never experienced before.

Turkey has a Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund, functional since 1986 and which has the aim to “help people in the state of poverty and destitution”<sup>134</sup>. The official heads of the neighbourhood - the *mukhtars* - assess applications and forward the names of those in need to the Fund. There are 931 Solidarity Foundations in Turkey<sup>135</sup> managed by different local authorities. The rule is that a “certification of poverty” from the local *mukhtar* must be provided to the applicant. Further on, the municipal authorities go and check the living situation of the person by questioning also the neighbours. In terms of health also, the poor people without social insurance

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<sup>134</sup> See General Directorate of Social Assistance [Sosyal Yardımlar Genel Müdürlüğü], <https://sosyalyardimlar.aile.gov.tr>

<sup>135</sup> Website of the Fund: [www.sydgm.gov.tr](http://www.sydgm.gov.tr)

can benefit from the Green Card Scheme [*Yeşil Kart*], which has provided health treatment services free of charge for Turkish citizens since 1992. The “green card” beneficiaries are required to have an income of less than 1/3 of the minimum wage level. The “certified” poor can receive financial or in-kind aid regularly. Many of these “certified poor” are urban Roma. However, during field interviews, most of them were not able to mention which institution / department has responsibility for it or which rule has been applied, nor for how long they will be entitled to benefit from it. A Roma woman in Küçükbakkalköy who would have been eligible for social welfare due to her illness gave a rather confusing account during an interview in 2013 on how she received allowances from the authorities (not being sure which):

“because I am diabetic, I did not strive [to find out how to get the allowances]; [a Roma leader] came instead and made possible the money for us, but [it will be] only for a year”.

The support mentioned was not received at the moment of the interview, although some months have passed after the “promise”. When asked when she thinks the allowance will be received, she stated that “maybe end of the month or the other end of the month”. Those interviewed during my fieldwork in the Küçükbakkalköy area seemed not to have tried at all (or some of them not consistently) to apply to the municipality or other authorities to access such funds, assuming that the process might be difficult or simply because they did not know where exactly to go. One woman in Küçükbakkalköy also said that she does not want to “deal with it” because she is illiterate and she would not know where exactly to go and what to do:

“Because I cannot read, I will go to places I do not know. My husband’s reading is also of a first grade level...”

Roma in different areas of Turkey narrate different stories about their interaction with the Solidarity Fund. During field research, many informants mentioned that some Roma are reluctant to take the “*fakirlik belgesi*” [poverty certificate] either for adults or for their children to use in school, since the very fact of being seen taking the document or being known as “officially poor” is considered humiliating and degrading.

Alternatively, people receive goods mostly during election campaigns or through favours provided by intermediaries (e.g. Roma community leaders, NGO representatives, municipal advisors etc.) who give them goods in exchange for



participation in different events which require mass participation (e.g. political rallies), for signatures of different “lists” (including voting lists) etc. or just for “buying” their “patience” (e.g. the case of some of the Küçükbakkalköy displaced families with no housing alternatives who have been provided goods on short term in the absence of housing options). These type of actions mobilise a sense of “neighbourliness, fictional kinship, mutual assistance, and volunteerism” (White 2002:269), which AKP inherited from its progenitor party - Refah Partisi [Welfare Party] and which proves to be crucial in micro-managing urban regeneration projects. Through the aid provided in different (superficial) forms, the authorities manage to keep the pulse of the neighbourhood and effectively contain potential “insurgent forms of citizenship”, by eclipsing them with a “calculus of compensation” (Roy 2009 cited in Özdemir & Eraydın 2012:20).

Critiques against this situation come from scholars, the civil society and generally from those affiliated with the opposition parties in Turkey. They criticize the unpredictability and unsustainability of this type of aid. Moreover, authorities are accused of being corrupted and of channelling aid to vulnerable groups as a form of manipulation for economic or political gains. According to Karaman, this process is “administered in a completely informal manner and there are no publicly available records for either the amount of donations received from contractors or the amount distributed to aid recipients” (2012:12). The very fact that the social assistance is administered by the state and aid is channelled to beneficiaries, at times, in an unaccountable and irregular manner, the image that is created is of “indebtedness” (Buğra 2009 cited in Karaman 2012:11) of the poor (including the poor Roma) towards the authorities. This apparent self-appointed role as “brokers in charity” (Buğra & Keyder 2006:224) of the municipal representatives is considered by scholars to be building an emerging policy of charitable gift giving and a “political economy of *sadaka*” (Buğra 2009). On this point, back in 2006, the Prime Minister at the time (Erdoğan) stated that the “*sadaka* is part of our culture” and that “there is nothing wrong with that” (Karaman 2012:10). *Sadaka* is a term of Arabic origin meaning “charity” and describing the act of giving out of compassion, love, friendship / fraternity, ultimately a religious duty or form of generosity. Critics further the idea that since this “is not a rights-based approach, it creates a relation of gift exchange and thus consolidates the AKP’s political credibility as a communitarian party” (Karaman 2012:11). Therefore, being conveniently left “in an

ambivalent intermediate zone”, what is supposed to be welfare state policy becomes “a highly efficient supplement to neoliberalism” (Karaman 2012:12). Nevertheless, sociologists consider that it is difficult to prevent poverty and social exclusion through “informal mechanisms” or through “the formal social security provisions specific to the Turkish welfare regime” (Buğra & Keyder 2003:19).

The short and long term impact of these welfare policies on the recipient poor (including the vulnerable Roma) need to be further examined. Regardless of the value they have as survival mechanisms, however, these practices have a direct effect on the positioning of the community in relation to power entities. Besides being maintained indebted and dependent, the community’s behaviour transforms to fit the requirements or aspirations of the giver. The same way in which, at a more macro level, the nature of available funding orients the interventions and the structuring of the civil society (which tends to craft projects that fit the objectives and the guidelines of the donors and not necessarily the real needs of the communities), at a micro level, these gestures of giving disguised sometimes under the practices of state welfare, influence the way people behave and interact. A Roma woman interviewed in Istanbul observed that her family in Istanbul started to behave differently since they had to frequent the municipal offices for social welfare. Women in the family started to cover more (wearing their scarfs differently and putting on a particular type of overcoat which identifies them as “religious”) and men frequented the local mosque more often or even participate in the meetings of religious sects informally favoured by the local authorities (even if they had never been particularly religious in the past). Elmas Arus calls the Roma exhibiting this behaviour “chameleon people” [Tr. *bukalemun halk*], since they seem to be ready and able to adapt to the “environment” they are exposed to, acting in a way that would please the “giver”, the resource and power holder, as a form of survival mechanism.

#### ***4.2.4. From Survival Mechanisms to Livelihoods Strategies of Urban Roma***

Livelihoods strategies are a combination of activities and choices that people undertake in order to meet their various needs at different times. Short term, pragmatic survival oriented strategies are reactive tactics that people use in order to “get by” since they are adopted “out of necessity rather than choice” (Meikle et al.

2001:12). Longer-term priorities aim at the development of sustainable livelihoods and at achieving better livelihoods outcomes.

The urban poor seem to have the capacity to “make and remake” space in ways that allow them to survive (Chandhoke 1993:64). The *gecekondu* neighbourhoods, or “*Roman mahalleleri*” [Roma neighbourhoods] which present different levels of poverty or the urban pockets of poverty inhabited by the Roma are spaces<sup>136</sup>, which allow for disadvantaged populations to balance their less demanding forms of inhabiting with the everyday challenges of the urban areas. Livelihoods in such spaces survive to a great extent due to their low maintenance costs, the lack of regulated payments and the “liberty” inhabitants can take to manage their space and households. The *gecekondu* settlements in Turkey are not entirely like squatter settlements / slums in other parts of the world since they can have proper buildings, streets paved by the municipalities, open spaces, schools, electricity, water supply, sewage systems, shops etc. The housing in *gecekondu* in this respect can be easier appraised as a “vehicle for social change”, rather than in terms of its physical standard. This perspective is supported by a number of authors, including Turner & Fichter (1972:301). Particularly Turner discussed of “uncontrolled settlements” as means for social change and considered that marginal settlements could be “more appropriately described as self-improving suburbs than as slums” (Turner 1965, in Peattie & Aldrete-Haas 1981:160-161).

Turner (1965:152-155) argued that housing is a “source of economic security and mobility” and that marginal settlements can provide evidence for social advance rather than deterioration in urban settings. Following Turner’s ideas, I argue that, in Turkey, these informal settlements foster the opportunity for the Roma to advance socially, regardless of some people’s more acute need for adequate housing. Although there are scholars who argue that these spaces are, in fact, “integrated and active contributors to economic growth” (Frankenhoff 1967; Bamberger 1968; Peattie 1975:47; Lomnitz 1978:229; Lloyd 1979:246), some consider that these types of settlements are segregated enclaves or parasitic environments filled with poverty,

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<sup>136</sup> Bourdieu defined the notion of space as a field, which “is a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. All the individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies” (1998:40-41, cited in Lingard et al. 2005:2)

delinquency and decadence. Stokes, who worked on a theory of slums, considered that they are “the home of the poor and the stranger” and that these “are the classes not (as yet) integrated into the life of the city” (1962:188). The determinants of slums, as pointed out by Stokes, are the “psychological attitude toward the possibility of success in moving up through the class structure by assimilation or acculturation to full participation in the economic and social life of the community” and the “socio-economic handicaps and barriers to such movement”. Moreover, these spaces are populated with those who are unable to meet “society’s minimum standards for full utilization and employability on any normal basis” (Stokes 1962:190-191).

The poorest Roma are settled in neighbourhoods where they are clustered on the basis of shared poverty and these spaces help them find survival mechanisms appropriate for their condition. Even if not always, family ties are generally strong and extended families live together in the same household. The Roma, however, do not have strong social solidarity networks with the non-Roma population. Moreover, support from Roma and non-Roma NGOs is scarce because NGOs have no resources and no power, and because some NGOs are involved more in representation and in competing with each other for power than in securing services and rights for the communities they allegedly represent.

The *mahalle / gecekonu* neighbourhood offers gathering venues (front yards of houses and teahouses) for socialisation and interaction<sup>137</sup>, which also serve as sources of acquiring information about labour availability. Manpower selected from *gecekonu* is cheap and chances for finding low-paid and temporary work appear often. In this regard, it can be argued that these settings have been providing the necessary manpower for the urban areas’ growing industrial sector at minimum costs (Tekeli 1982; Şenyapılı 1992; Buğra 2003). Notwithstanding, the neighbourhood and its community becomes the trustworthy network that channels information and makes certain connections with the outside opportunities. Urban ethnic clustering in poor neighbourhoods is generating mutual help and joint exploitation of urban marginal resources, which are nevertheless limited. Moreover, the location of the *gecekonu* into the heart of the city represents an advantage in accessing various informal unskilled jobs and resources. The informal scrap and paper collection in the

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<sup>137</sup> Some of the newly built apartment blocks by TOKİ and where, allegedly, some of the displaced Roma will be moved in (as stated during the 2010 Roma Opening), have incorporated communal spaces in the form of “community centres” which are artificially attempting to tie communities together and illustrate the neo-liberal commodification of public space.

cities, for instance, have been done mostly by Roma and, from this point of view, these jobs could be qualified as what Lieberman (1980) called “ethnic niche” which supports households to survive and even encourages entrepreneurial demarches for potential sustainability of their livelihoods. There are, for instance, family informal “businesses” of *hurda* [scrap] collection which extended their work from manual / individual collection to a second level of intermediary collection, using trucks they own to transport and sell the loads to other intermediaries or directly to factories. However, this niche of the Roma started to be challenged, in certain areas, by the poor Kurdish immigrants and increasingly in recent years by the new urban poor which are the Syrian refugees who have escaped the war in their country and then managed to leave the refugee camps in Turkey.

Undoubtedly, urban economies are more demanding on their inhabitants, therefore the urban poor “need higher cash incomes to survive, unlike their rural counterparts who may rely more heavily on subsistence agriculture or payment in kind and who are more likely to have access to free or common property resources” (Wratten 1995). The Roma in “200 Houses” in Samsun, who used to work on a seasonal basis in the villages around the area in agriculture, acknowledge that life in the villages could be much easier, since there are fewer demands and more availability of work than in the city.

Urban life has become increasingly demanding in Turkey, especially in the cities that strive to become global metropolis. Consequently, the informal settlements in these cities lack the suitable services and resources to cope with the “rhythm” of the city. Urban development in Turkey seems mostly to empower the rich and to have profound negative effects on poor people’s livelihoods, proving once more that “linkages between specific cities and the global economy” represent another source of vulnerability for the urban poor (Tinotenda 2013:3).<sup>138</sup> Moreover, urban regeneration affects tremendously the urban poor and implicitly most of the Roma who live in *gecekondu* settlements.

Housing space can be considered an arena for struggle between individual autonomy and powerful governmental institutions (Peattie et al. 1981:5-6). When people are moved away from these neighbourhoods in apartment blocks where they

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<sup>138</sup> People living there do not get employed because of the “neighbourhood stamp” they carry (Tr. *mahalle damgası*). Their place of living is both their survival mechanism but also their trap into perpetual poverty.

suddenly enter a regulated pattern of living (rent payment or house instalments, services bills etc.), they do not manage to cope. They benefit only from scarce and unbalanced income while having to comply with requirements of new standards of living. When provided to the Roma, housing alternatives are usually far away from the centres and make the adaptation very difficult. Hammond suggests that when “physically relocating people to remote areas” a certain invisibilization is imposed upon them (2008:2). For example, in the case of certain Roma families, who had no other choice than to move from Küçükbakkalköy, after being evicted following urban regeneration, it can be said that their “voluntary decision” to settle in barracks at the outskirts of Nişantepe constitutes also an invisibilization of their vulnerability. Their hardships increased since they have more trouble now to connect with what the city has to offer in terms of sources of subsistence. In the Küçükbakkalköy Roma *gecekondu* neighbourhood, some municipal services were available and people’s mobility was easier within the city. The new settlement where people found refuge in, is situated far away, at the outskirts of Istanbul, with difficult connection to transportation means or other facilities, including opportunities for work, complicates inhabitant’s relationship with the city. In this case as well, urban transformation projects result in the displacing and replacing of new forms of poverty (Bartu & Kolluoğlu 2008:3). In the new apartment blocks or temporary unregulated settlements, people have to cope with relatively long travel and high transport costs to reach places where they can find work, frequent clinics and schools etc. They are dependent on purchase of basic essential items like all other urban inhabitants, but have much less of a resource pool to draw from to secure their living. People pay more for their food since they lack storage facilities and often have to rely on credit from local shopkeepers, who sell items at a relatively higher price than the prices of regular supermarkets (Rengasamy et al. 2001; Tolossa 2010). Moreover, the inhabitants who do not possess marketable skills, when displaced from their own neighbourhoods and sent to other parts of the city, are put in disadvantaged positions since they are “detached from their social and business networks” and have hard times to redress (Tok & Oğuz 2011:11). All these new conditions make the urban displaced Roma even more vulnerable.

In Turkey, more and more scholars speak about the fact that the Turkish authorities under the AKP rule reinforce gradually neoliberal policies, starting to destroy the genuine socio-cultural fabric of the cities and the dignified coexistence of

different social groups. M.C., an American scholar doing research on ethnicities in Turkey emphasized in this regard that it is hard to watch dignity “drowning” in “real time” and that what used to be “admirable about Turkey” was the way it allowed “room for real dignity and pride in places that many societies do not”: “That is the dignity of earnest resistance in the face of a 'hopeless' cause, the dignity of a dilapidated building, the dignity of doing one small thing but doing it very well, the dignity of the *hurdaci*, the *çaycı* [tea seller], the *seyyar satıcısı* [peddler], the *kapıcı* [doorman], the *çoban* [shepherd], the *çirak* [apprentice], the *usta* [master], the *bakkal* [grocer], the water carriers...”<sup>139</sup>

UNDP considers that poor living conditions in settlements cause “demotivation and deactivation in relation to broader social integration” and that one of the consequences of struggling to secure the basic running of a household is the “loss of motivation for self-development” (2013:8-9). The European Urban Charter (adopted in 1992 and with a second version in 2008), defined income poverty and the deprivation from living conditions as violations of human rights. In addition, the Charter recorded the fact that “spatial inequality processes, the out of hand increase in the prices of land in city centres, parallel ghettoization in city boundaries, and walled closed settlements emerging in some areas”, are promoting a “spatial discrimination that is breaking up the towns” and which are a “serious” motive for “worry”.

#### 4.3. Conclusion

The Roma have been invisible for a long time in the state policies and, out of lack of processes and structures to address their marginalization, they used this invisibility as mechanism of survival. In 2010, the Turkish Government started to make Roma visible in policy provision, by launching a Roma Opening and initiating the works of a Strategy that was expected to address their needs and to respond to the requirements set by the EU for pre-accession. What the Government set as first priority through the Roma Opening was one trait that made the Roma visible, along other marginal groups: their poor living conditions in the urban *gecekondu* settlements all over Turkey. However, people who have been moved out of their

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<sup>139</sup> M.C., Facebook post, May 2016

former neighbourhoods due to urban regeneration as well as those relocated in new housing schemes consider that income generation activities and employment would have helped them truly to move themselves out of poverty and possibly out of the slums, if provided in the first place. Lack of secure income, lack of proper living conditions and other assets that would help them to strategize better for the sustainability of their livelihoods, determine the Roma to exploit marginal niches of survival, to trade their rights for immediate gain and to get exploited by intra-community or external gatekeepers and other power-holders.

One of the greatest shocks that affects their livelihoods is the urban regeneration projects that target the eradication of *gecekondu* slums and the rebuilding of new spaces of living in which the poor Roma are not able to integrate into. Destroying their former homes, evicting and displacing them, urban regeneration / transformation increases the vulnerability of the Roma, leaving them with limited mechanisms of survival.

Some Roma individuals or families living in old *gecekondu* settlements do manage to increase their livelihood assets and change their living conditions over time. Some Roma manage to strategize for their livelihoods and manage to a certain extent to explore individual niches of survival and development as well as to exercise different degrees of leadership in order to create opportunities for redress of their communities. Their personal development, previous relationship with the “otherness” and engagement with the power-holders, influences their choices and resilience.

However, the great majority of the poor Roma, who had their poverty and exclusion passed from a generation to another, have fewer chances to recover and strategize in order to render their livelihoods sustainable. The deterioration of their traditional occupations, the lack of transferable skills to the modern market alongside the marginal places they inhabit sets their livelihoods assets at a lower standard. Once they lose however their homes in the *gecekondu*, as impoverished as they were, they lose a capital which allowed them to survive and potentially give the chance to members of households to find niches to escape the marginalized community and lift themselves out of poverty.

As emphasized in the theoretical framework of this thesis (section 1.2.), poverty and social exclusion are interdependent multidimensional phenomena. The multiple disadvantages that the Roma communities are confronted with are in great extent the result of invisibilization through lack of adequate policies to address their



condition, fact which contributed in time to the inter-generational continuity of their poverty. Although versatile in using their invisibility to exploit resources of survival, the Roma struggle to keep up with the demands of the contemporary society, the poorest of them leading a struggle for which they are not equipped. In the particular case of Turkey, where the AKP Government has developed a welfare system that activates different forms of humanitarian aid, some of the poor Roma benefit in certain extent from it. They manage to survive, however they do not get to escape neither from poverty nor exclusion. In the absence of strategic sustainable demarches for development, providing immediate or intermittent aid to cover basic needs keeps people in a form of incapacity to plan and develop. In line with the livelihoods framework of Chambers & Conway (1991), security and sustainability is possible for those who have access to adequate resources and are able to perform income-generating activities, alongside being able to mitigate risks, meet contingencies and ease shocks.

## **5. INFLUENCE OF HOUSING POLICIES ON THE VISIBILITY AND THE VULNERABILITY OF THE ROMA**

Starting from the premise that housing provision is both an incentive as well as an obstacle for human development (Gallo 2012), the chapter provides a perspective on the policies and practices on housing at international, European and national level in Turkey and presents the role of adequate housing in addressing poverty and vulnerability in the context of Roma living conditions and desired policy outcomes.

In Turkey, the construction business proved to be the most lucrative sector of the AKP regime and has been widely praised for advancing the economy of the country. The real estate development sector is also linked with urban regeneration and this aspect has been equally contested for disregarding the grassroots, the social fabric, livelihoods and voice of those living in the targeted areas. Therefore, the dimensions of neoliberal orientation of housing policies in Turkey are examined in this chapter from the perspective of the effect they have on the Roma communities. The urban *gecekondu* neighbourhoods phenomenon is presented from the point of view of its dichotomous role as segregated space of vulnerability of the poor and of the tolerated minorities and new-comers (Kurds escaping conflict from S-E Turkey, Roma looking for a better life etc.), as well as from the point of view of a space which has the makings to enable livelihoods security through its low-maintenance status and constituency. Moreover, the chapter brings to light the scale of urban transformation through the official regeneration projects, which change the dynamics of the communities and exacerbate the vulnerability of the Roma. On the other hand, the governmental housing programmes for the poor and specifically for the Roma are analysed from the perspective of their accessibility and suitability to facilitate livelihoods strategies that are relevant for the capacities of the targeted communities. In this context, the structural challenges brought about by the housing options for the poor Roma are analysed from the perspective of the coping mechanisms and livelihoods strategies people employ.

Therefore, the chapter coagulates the response to the third sub-question of this research that refers to the influence that the housing policies have on the poverty and social exclusion of Roma. It takes into account the fact that one of the basic

prerequisites for social inclusion is having adequate housing and shows further that housing alone does not “guarantee social inclusion” (Quilgars & Pleace 2016:5).

### **5.1. The Housing Prerequisite for the Roma Inclusion Policies in Europe**

Housing is a social determinant of human development and a life-shaping indicator. The United Nations places housing among “the most basic needs and conditions for life” (UNDP 2013:8). As discussed in the section 1.2.1., besides having a place to live, having housing means having security, as well as being a worthy member of the society. However, living in poor, marginalized settlements has serious repercussions on the lives of individuals. Long-term deprivation, limited or no civic participation, due to poverty or to the marginality of the inhabited space, leads to gradual loss of confidence in the “system” and a sense of personal failure which is often passed down to the next generations (Hulse & Burke 2000).

Housing is considered a critical policy area in fighting poverty, and international and EU bodies, alongside national governments, have issued various provisions on access to housing and standards of dwelling. Urbanization, generally, has great potential to improve people’s lives, however “inadequate urban management, often based on inaccurate or biased information and perceptions, can turn opportunity into disaster” (UNFPA 2007). The standards and criteria set by intergovernmental institutions for housing provision refer to affordability of the costs generated by the type of housing inhabited, habitability (guarantying physical safety / adequate space, protection against cold, damp, heat, rain, wind, other threats to health and structural hazards), accessibility (specific needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups being taken into account), security of tenure (guarantying legal protection against forced evictions, harassment and other threats), availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure (occupants having safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, energy for cooking, heating, lighting, food storage or refuse disposal), suitable location (housing being near to employment opportunities, health-care services, schools, childcare centres and other social facilities) and cultural adequacy to the specificity of its household members (UN-HABITAT 2011:9-11). The location of a settlement is acknowledged to determine to a great extent the development possibilities of individuals and their “broader integration into

different areas of the public sphere” (UNDP 2013:8-9)<sup>140</sup>. Moreover, the provision of housing, without taking into account the suitability to the needs of the inhabitants, including their social and cultural background, does not always have positive outcomes for its beneficiaries. In the case of the Roma, the (lack of) employment prospects is an important element that relates to the type of housing they opt for. When families’ income depends on a type of work that requires enhanced accessibility to the city, spaces for storage (e.g.: for paper and metal collectors or for street vendors / peddlers), the type of housing provided and its location are important prerequisites for developing livelihoods strategies. However, regardless of quality and suitability, the provision of housing alone, without being accompanied by other supporting measures<sup>141</sup>, like employment opportunities, has limited positive impact on the livelihoods of the people.

At international level, the source of housing rights instruments and jurisprudence emerge from the UN and its monitoring bodies, the CoE and its European Social Charter, the Convention on Human Rights and the EU. The right to housing was recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>142</sup> and was later embedded in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>143</sup> of the UN<sup>144</sup>. The European Social Charter of the CoE, with its allied European Court of Human Rights, serves as a point of reference in European Union law<sup>145</sup> and guarantees fundamental social and economic rights among which rights

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<sup>140</sup> A UN report in 2011 recommended states to take responsibility and ensure proper infrastructure in settlements, making sure that housing facilities are “adequately located” in order to meet the needs of the inhabitants in a “non-discriminatory” manner (UN 2011:19)

<sup>141</sup> The European Network<sup>141</sup> of the representatives of 12 Member States of the EU, which aims to promote the use of Structural Funds for the social inclusion of Roma, identified some factors that have “a positive effect on the success of local Roma inclusion programmes” (EURoma Network 2014:8). These refer to addressing the housing issues together with employment due to the fact that “access to employment and housing are the central drivers in urban areas (including for Roma migrants)”. The report highlighted the fact that “employment combined with social housing can act as a springboard complemented with training activities and individual education itineraries (including systematic support to Roma children to prevent early school leaving)” (EURoma Network 2014:9).

<sup>142</sup> Article 25: “Right to an adequate standard of living”,  
[http://www.claiminghumanrights.org/udhr\\_article\\_25.html#at27](http://www.claiminghumanrights.org/udhr_article_25.html#at27)

<sup>143</sup> The 1966 Covenant which entered into force on 3.01.1976 was signed by Turkey on 15.08.2000 and then ratified on 23.09.2003. Source: United Nations Treaty Collection:  
[https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg\\_no=IV-3&chapter=4&clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-3&chapter=4&clang=_en)

<sup>144</sup> Article 11 of the Covenant stipulates that the signatory states “recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions”.

<sup>145</sup> Article 34 of the 2000 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU recognizes the right to social and housing assistance, within the context of alleviating social exclusion and poverty: “In order to combat social exclusion and poverty, the Union recognizes and respects the right to social and housing

related to employment, housing, health, education, social protection and welfare. For a period of 30 years, before its revision in 1996, the European Social Charter did not include provisions related to housing or protection against poverty and social exclusion (CoE 2013:66). The revised Charter affirms the right to housing, approaching it from the context of vulnerability and mentions expressly the need of member states “to promote access to housing of an adequate standard; to prevent and reduce homelessness with a view to its gradual elimination; to make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources” (CoE 1996: Article 31). The Charter provides the criteria for “adequate” and “affordable” housing which need to be taken into account when elaborating and putting in practice housing policies. Accordingly, “adequate housing” would need to take into account the fact that the dwelling must be safe from a health and hygiene point of view, to have basic amenities (e.g. water, heating, waste disposal, sanitation facilities, etc.) and electricity, must not be overcrowded and, ultimately, must be protected from “forced eviction and other threats”. Furthermore, “affordable housing” would imply that housing costs must be sufficiently low that everyone could, “on a long-term basis, maintain a minimum standard of living as defined by the society they live in” (CoE 2013:68). Turkey is a member of CoE since August 1949 being regarded as one of its “founding members” and, from this point of view, CoE is considered to represent for Turkey “the first institutional tie established with Europe after World War II” (TMFA 2015). Turkey ratified the CoE 1961 European Social Charter on 24.11.1989, accepting 46 of its 72 paragraphs, however it did not sign nor ratified Protocol 2 reforming the control mechanism as well as the Protocol 3 on collective complaints. Further on, Turkey ratified also the revised 1996 Charter on 27.06.2007 and accepted 91 of its 98 revised paragraphs<sup>146</sup>.

Although theoretically the housing authority in Turkey is supposed to and provides in a certain extent housing for the poor, including the Roma, the needs are far from being covered adequately. The housing provided specifically for the Roma prove to be in large extent unsuitable to the cultural and social condition as well to the occupational capabilities of the Roma. Moreover, evictions and abuses continue while individual complaints and legal action at national and European level are very

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assistance so as to ensure a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources, in accordance with the rules laid down by Community law and national laws and practices” (EU 2007:9).

<sup>146</sup> Source: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/turin-european-social-charter>

limited. As in the case of Turkey, although different states abstain to adhere fully or partially to human rights treaties granting the right to housing, the right to human dignity which derives from having a suitable decent home is considered to have achieved the status of international customary law and therefore legally binding for all (Kucs et al. 2008:102).

In 2005, through its Recommendation on Improving the Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers in Europe, CoE urged its member states to ensure “clearly defined national housing-related legislation, addressing various practices such as housing discrimination, discriminatory harassment in housing, discriminatory boycotts, ghettoization, racial and residential segregation, and other forms of discrimination against nomadic and semi-nomadic Roma/Gypsies and Travellers, as well as unequal housing conditions and access to housing, such as social housing, public housing, do-it-yourself housing and cooperative housing” (CoE 2005). Later on, in 2009, the CoE’s Commissioner for Human Rights issued another Recommendation on the Implementation of the Right to Housing, addressing the discrimination in all aspects of housing affecting Roma and Travellers and made specific reference to the need of member states to adopt national housing strategies that should “identify disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, and include positive measures for ensuring their effective enjoyment of the right to housing” (CoE 2009). Additionally, different international legal instruments that deal with the rights of vulnerable groups pay a particular attention to women’s right<sup>147</sup> to enjoy adequate living conditions<sup>148</sup>. The 2005 CoE Recommendation mentioned above emphasized also the fact that member states should make sure that “anti-discrimination laws prohibit gender-based discrimination, directly or indirectly, in the supply of goods and services, including housing” and that they should “foster housing policies addressing the needs of Roma women, and in particular single mothers, victims of domestic violence and other categories of disadvantaged Roma women” (CoE 2005). Furthermore, the 2006, European Parliament Resolution on the Situation of Roma Women in the European Union highlighted the fact that “a significant proportion of

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<sup>147</sup> A report of the UN’s Human Rights Council highlighted “the importance of recognizing intersectional discrimination as it affects certain groups of women, in particular vis-à-vis the segregation of Roma communities” (UN 2011:5)

<sup>148</sup> See Article 5(e) (iii) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Articles 9 and 28 of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, Articles 14 (2) and 15 (2) of the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and Articles 16 (1) and 27 (3) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Roma women throughout Europe currently live in housing that is a threat to their health” and “under constant threat of forced eviction” (EP 2006b). Forced evictions take a major toll also on Roma children’s development and access to a better life, rendering new generations of excluded. The 2013 European Commission Recommendation called “Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage” brought in discussion the necessity to “make [it] possible for children to enjoy adequate living standards that are compatible with a life in dignity” and to “provide children with a safe, adequate housing and living environment” in a way which “supports their development”<sup>149</sup> (EC 2013:8).

Due to improper living conditions, in marginalized settlements, disconnected from the “life” and the “facilities” of the rest of the society, many poor Roma populate growing ghetto-like settlements<sup>150</sup> in urban areas, face constant evictions and are ultimately set on the path to migration. The Roma in the poorest countries of the EU sometimes chose to find better opportunities in other richer EU countries. Some search for income generating activities and use remittances to build their future back home, others chose to shift permanently their households and find a place in the society of the hosting countries. For the Roma in Turkey, migrating freely to other countries has not been a real option. However, even if some examples exist (especially related to the wave of migration of workers from Turkey to Germany after the 1960, the Roma move internally for better opportunities from city to city and generally use the poorest areas of urban spaces as stepping stone in their livelihoods development strategies. The fact that they get settled in the poorest areas of the big cities, in poor housing, becomes nevertheless a trap for many families who remain stuck in marginality and do not manage to find possibilities to advance their status even after decades. Through migration, poverty is transferred across borders, and the slums and camps at the outskirts of major European cities or inside pockets of poverty in urban areas increase in number. With illegal settlements come also

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<sup>149</sup> The Recommendation envisages to make it “possible for families with children to live in affordable, quality housing (including social housing), address situations of exposure to environmental hazards, overcrowding and energy poverty; Support families and children at risk of homelessness by avoiding evictions, unnecessary moves, separation from families as well as providing temporary shelter and long-term housing solutions; Pay attention to children’s best interests in local planning; avoid ‘ghettoization’ and segregation by promoting a social mix in housing as well as adequate access to public transport; Reduce children’s harmful exposure to a deteriorating living and social environment to prevent them from falling victim to violence and abuse” (EC 2013:8).

<sup>150</sup> The European Parliament adopted in 2005 the Resolution on the Situation of Roma in the European Union (EP 2005), a document that puts emphasis on the issues of ghettoization and discrimination in the provision of housing.

forced evictions and expulsions, usually with no alternatives offered than going back to the countries of origin to the settlements they initially ran from or to set camp in other areas until the next eviction.

The CoE, UN and the EU legal provisions and recommendations on housing give generally a minimum core obligation to states to ensure a threshold of housing in a non-discriminatory way, even in the cases in which international assistance is required (Alston & Quinn 1987). Activists and international organisations' representatives consider that a human rights-based approach should be employed when discussing housing issues of vulnerable groups such as the Roma since, in this way, the legal obligations of governments would be highlighted, "as opposed to moral or humanitarian demarches" (Dias & Leckie 1996:38). In practical terms, even if states are adhering to different inter-governmental agreements, they are free to decide<sup>151</sup> the manner in which they provide housing for their citizens. It is further argued that member states either do not subscribe fully to such agreements or recommendations or appear not to take their enforcement mechanisms "seriously" (Brillat 2009:62). A strong example in this regard is the application of the European Social Charter, which does have a mechanism of monitoring and a system of collective complaints<sup>152</sup> but still fails to convince states parties to apply it. Notwithstanding, the way to improve the implementation of the right to housing is argued by Kucs et al. as lying "in the more effective use of domestic and international legal remedies to challenge the violations" (2008:101).

At its turn, the EU<sup>153</sup> does not directly address housing rights, but it is "circumscribing much of the national housing law and policy within its own rights approaches" (Kenna 2005:8). Moreover, studies show that half of the EU member countries do not have official definitions of exclusion from housing or homelessness and that there is "no common definition of substandard housing at European level"<sup>154</sup> (EFILWC 2012:5). In terms of strategic policy making for the Roma, the EU has

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<sup>151</sup> Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the UN stipulates that the "States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent".

<sup>152</sup> See "Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter Providing for a System of Collective Complaints", <http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/158>

<sup>153</sup> The EU Council's Race Equality Directive prohibits all forms of discrimination, including discrimination in the field of housing (CEU 2000:Art.3).

<sup>154</sup> This definition of "unfit housing" (Fr. *logement indigne*) in France is argued to be more a political definition than a concept used on legal documents (Dandolova, 2007).



initiated in 2011 a Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020<sup>155</sup>, that sets the targets<sup>156</sup> for improving the situation of Roma within the EU Member States and aims also at providing Roma with equal access to housing and public utilities (EC 2011b:7). Although EU support is provided in the form of Structural Funding for which the countries need to apply and the European Commission is monitoring the implementation process, the responsibility remains with “the national authorities to ensure that these opportunities are fully acted upon” (CoE 2012b:148).

Regardless of the multitude of agreements, recommendations and plans of the EU and other intergovernmental bodies<sup>157</sup>, housing remains among the most inadequately addressed issues that the Roma are facing throughout Europe. The challenge is to get the states to apply the existing policies and guidelines, by involving the beneficiaries in designing the solutions that best fit their needs, and allocate the necessary resources for their implementation. Notwithstanding, the implementation of housing provisions is arguably the most costly among the needs to be addressed by states for their vulnerable populations, including Roma, and this could be one of the reasons for which limited action occurs at local level, even in the case of authorities which show commitment to social inclusion.

## **5.2. Dimensions of Housing Policies in the Neoliberal Turkey**

### ***5.2.1. Housing Provision as the Social Welfare Arm of Neoliberalism in Turkey and its Enabling Stakeholders***

#### ***5.2.1.1. The Gecekondu Space***

Turkey has witnessed continuous forced and economic migration to the major cities since the start of industrialization and the development of a market economy

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<sup>155</sup> Website of the initiative: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/index_en.htm)

<sup>156</sup> The EU national strategies adopted by national governments and monitored by the EC contain housing components similar to the Action Plans of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005 – 2015), an initiative supported by OSI-WB-UN-EU which covered the non-EU states.

<sup>157</sup> Another international body, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) elaborated an Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti, offering recommendations related to housing (OSCE 2003). Moreover, its 2011 Belgrade Declaration explicitly calls for changes in state policies relating to Roma (and Roma housing) (OSCE 2011).

after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, including the period of the 1948 Marshall Plan<sup>158</sup> (Elliot 2010:31). The migrants (coming from all parts of Turkey, but generally from rural areas and mostly Alevi and Kurdish from Southeast Turkey) settled in the urban peripheries, mostly on public land, in informal settlements called *gecekondu* (lit. “landed by night”) where they started to build initially without any planning or infrastructure. The earliest official definition of *gecekondu* appears in a report of the Ministry of Reconstruction and Resettlement of 1962 and describes buildings that are: “Built on an occupied land; Constructed in a way that does not conform to building codes and regulations; [that do] Not conform to hygiene and engineering rules; [and are] Constructed hastily” (Akbulut & Başlık 2011). The practice accepted by the authorities was that, although illegal, people would occupy public or private land and would build quickly housing structures that would pass as accommodations and would help them avoid eviction. They would then start to pay property taxes on the standing house, which was a step towards security of tenure, regardless of the fact that the land on which houses were built belonged to other owners, including the Treasury, municipality or foundations. Although, in most of the cases, payment of property taxes did not mean full formalization of property, they facilitated the provision of public infrastructure and services in the settlement by the local authorities.

More or less with the same approach, in the past, during the Seljuk and the Ottoman rule, civil regulations allowed tenure on land, based on local needs. As long as there were no objections from any private owner, the rulers would allow people to settle in a certain desired area. As political systems changed and “subjects” became “citizens”, land and housing tenure normally acquired a degree of legal status (Balamir & Payne 2001:1-2). However, in Turkey, since 1948, different laws overlooked informal tenure and development offences, in order to keep demands and conflicts in check, having in mind that evictions or demolitions have been always unproductive for politicians. Since the military coup of 1960<sup>159</sup>, amnesty<sup>160</sup> has been

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<sup>158</sup> On June 5, 1947, Secretary of State George C. Marshall issued a call for a comprehensive program to rebuild Europe. After the period following the World War II, due to fear of Communist expansion and the deterioration of economies in Europe, at the end of 1946, the Congress passed the Economic Cooperation Act in March 1948, approving funding over \$12 billion for the rebuilding of Western Europe. (Source: <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/marshall-plan>)

<sup>159</sup> The 27 May 1960 coup was the first military *coup d'état* in the history of the Turkish Republic. The coup was staged by a group of young military officers against the Government established by the Democratic Party. A second military coup in Turkey would come later on, in 1980.

granted to this type of informal settlements. Basic infrastructure and services started to be provided and populist regimes “tolerated” and used them to a great extent as sources of electoral capital, giving them “a natural political legitimacy” (Balamir & Payne 2001:5).

Along with the absence of formal social housing concept and policy to respond to the needs of the poor and the displaced, these practices helped the expansion of *gecekondu* areas in the big cities of Turkey. Additionally, following the 1960 coup, a new era began in Turkey, aiming at structuring a social welfare state and a parliamentary democracy with all its related implications (Akçali & Perinçek 2009). Allowing migrants to build informally in the cities and therefore “normalize” the informal settlements of *gecekondu*, aimed at avoiding the risk of long-term poverty of the migrants, and therefore their social exclusion. This “measure” allowed migrants to settle in the big cities together with their extended families and other people from the same social networks, giving them implicitly the possibility to support each other. A Roma man, who was evicted from a *gecekondu* neighbourhood in Küçükbakkalköy, after having lived there for decades, reminisced:

It was really good... We did not pay rent, it was relaxed; it was our place, nobody was chasing us, nobody was telling us “stand up and leave”.

The *gecekondu* concept in itself became “the most important social security object for at least two generations of a family” (Duyar-Kienast 2005:9). Furthermore, the state allowed the provision of title deeds or appropriation certificates for the occupied land or the built house, which implied a certain form of legalization of the *gecekondu*, enabling inhabitants to acquire legal residence and identification papers that made it easier to find employment in the formal sector<sup>161</sup> and benefit from the official social security provisions. Moreover, in 1984, the government issued a “general pardon for unauthorized constructions”, providing title deeds specifically to squatters who built on state land (Elliott 2010:33). As a result of these policies, the population of major cities expanded. By 1997, the urban population in Turkey had more than doubled to 40.8 million from 19.6 million in 1980. Almost 10 million

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<sup>160</sup> Since 1960, 16 amnesty laws were adopted by the government and accompanied by development plans and improvements in the 1980s and early 1990s. In parallel, unregistered construction continued in these areas (Elliott 2010:23).

<sup>161</sup> One additional vital link in the welfare system until 1980s was also the practice by which all family members of an individual employed in the formal sector could benefit from their health-care insurance (Buğra & Keyder 2003:18). This added up to the family safety net and helped them to cope with the demands of the urban living.

people out of the approximately 44 million urban inhabitants in Turkey were estimated to live in informal settlements / *gecekondu* (Elliott 2010:23). Moreover, 34.4% of the 15.1 million housing units stock recorded available in 2005 were categorized as illegal or unregistered (Elliott 2010:24).

Over time, due to the continuous growth of the urban areas and the expansion of the service sector, the housing demands of the middle class increased. This led to a jump in the value of land around the large cities. This affected also the *gecekondu* settings where small houses with gardens started to be replaced with multi-storeyed apartment blocks, which are not always respecting the safe building codes. According to the capacity of the household to make savings, the buildings were gradually constructed, while families were already inhabiting their ground or inferior levels. This has been a practice used in Turkey, both for economic reasons as well as to avoid certain taxes that do not apply when the house is considered being “under construction”. This is the reason for which some buildings in certain neighbourhoods seem always unfinished (and they can stay for this for decades), with no roofs installed and with metal bars still growing out at the tops of the concrete structure.

Some “*gecekondu* owners” started making a profit by renting to new-coming low-income families who became “*gecekondu* tenants” (Elliott 2010:32). While some people managed to construct their houses and gain title deeds for them, making their ownership official, renting accommodation in these settlements proved to be insecure, of poor quality and often lacking proper access to utilities. However, this was often the only rented tenure option for many low-income families living in the urban areas.

The population of *gecekondu* neighbourhoods, which gathered migrants from all over Turkey, including the poorest segments of the society (Roma, Kurds), became more and more targeted by political exploitation. The Islamic-oriented parties started to develop a political rhetoric that addressed the social, cultural and economic problems of the *gecekondu* inhabitants, giving the new migrants an identity and a political venue through which they could express their grievances (Delibaş 2014).

#### 5.2.1.2. “Roma Housing” Policy

The main demand and promise of the Roma Opening in Turkey was housing provision. During the mass gathering of 2010, attended by thousands of Roma, the Prime Minister at the time, Tayyip Erdoğan, stated that he did not want to see his “Roma brother living in tents and shanty houses anymore”. He further added: “God willing, we will build these houses in different places for our Roma brothers. And we will give them [the houses] without advance payment, with 100 Lira, 120 Lira monthly instalments to be paid for 20 years” (Ocak 2010).

As a result, the media announced that, in the framework of the “Roma housing” programme, 67,7 m<sup>2</sup> apartments would be built with two bedrooms and one living room in three-storey apartment blocks, each block consisting of eight apartments (NTVMSNBC 2011). Again, using mass media channels, TOKI (the Housing Development Administration) announced the plans for 2,524 units in 11 provinces with dense Roma population (Hürriyet 2010). However, in an official presentation by the President of TOKI, in 2010, it was indicated that in fact a total of 6,884 houses were envisaged for the Roma between 2003 and 2010 (Bayraktar 2010).

Different numbers of apartments have been alternately mentioned<sup>162</sup> and none of the Roma NGOs I came in contact with seemed to be really clear about the planning scale or the implementation and selection criteria of the beneficiaries of these houses. This issue was mentioned also in the 2011 EU Progress Report on Turkey. The report drew attention to the lack of sustainability and clarity of the housing plan for Roma and mentioned that it should be “carefully monitored and reviewed”, while “credible consultation with Roma communities” should be envisaged (EC 2011a).

The procedure of implementing this housing policy started with an official letter sent by the State Minister Faruk Çelik, in 2010, to the 81 Provincial Governorates in Turkey. The letter requested the estimation of Roma population and allocation of land from the property of the state for the upcoming housing project.

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<sup>162</sup> In June 2011, MP Ali Koyuncu reported to the Parliament that a number of 8,218 housing units will be built for the Roma (at the time 736 units being reported under construction, 2,748 to be tendered by 24.02.2012 and the rest in planning) (AK 2011). The media provided different figures also: NTVMSNBC (2011) announced that 4,284 houses were built for the Roma in that particular moment.

Many Governorates responded back that they had no Roma population, not being aware as yet of the different Roma and Roma-like groups living in their areas (either because they were not openly recognising their ethnicity or because they were Dom, Lom or Abdals and therefore not identifying as Roma etc.)<sup>163</sup>, and consequently concluded that they would not be eligible to apply the “Roma housing” policy. On the other hand, TOKI itself, which was designated as the state agency in charge of centralizing the “Roma estimations” and the requests from the provincial Governorates following State Minister Çelik’s demarche, seemed to be one of the barrier-building entities for this policy. In two mediatized cases, TOKI refused to approve the requests of Governorates to build houses for the Roma. These cases illustrate not only the incongruence of central governmental decisions with the practices and realities at local level, but also the preconceptions and discriminatory attitudes the state institutions have towards the Roma. Kocaeli Governorate and Izmit Municipality, who requested the building of “cheap housing” projects for the Roma, received a letter from the TOKI Presidency stating that there would be “no housing for the Roma. If we shall build houses for the Roma in Arızlı-Akpınar, we will not be able to sell the other houses which will be built there” (Kocaeli Gazetesi 2011). In response to this letter, the local authorities in Kocaeli Province sought an intervention from the central level. In this case, TOKI implied that the top-down decision to build houses specifically for Roma might be detrimental for business, assuming that the non-Roma might refuse to buy apartments and live in the same buildings with Roma neighbours.

A presentation made during a Council of Europe event in 2013 by a Turkish politician who worked on Roma issues, showed that TOKI was about to complete a number of 5,133 units for the Roma, which included houses, but also mosques and social and commercial facilities (e.g.: shopping centre, kiosks). The presentation highlighted that the construction of 5,133 units was ongoing in a total of 38 locations (across 23 provinces) in Turkey and that the proportion of completion varied for each location from 4% to 98%. The completion average however was presented as being around 80% in 2013. Nevertheless, at the time of my field research, during 2012-2013 and sometime in 2014, the Roma interviewed did not have a clear picture of the

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<sup>163</sup> An initiative which took some years to be fully accepted, has been started by a Roma NGO (Zero Discrimination Association), which worked towards better knowledge on Roma communities and the recognition of the Dom, the Lom and the Abdal, as related groups, alongside the Roma for the policy-making purposes.

number of the Roma housing as well as whom exactly would benefit from these projects.

#### 5.2.1.3. TOKI Authority

Articles 56 and 57 of the Turkish Constitution state that every Turkish citizen has the right to decent housing and that the State has a responsibility to help meet those needs and to promote mass housing projects. The Mass Housing Law allows the government to change from regulator to provider and take charge of housing delivery, fact which leads to increased investments in the field. Through the amendment of the *Gecekondu* Law no 775 / 20.07.1966, by Law No 5609 / 22.03.2007, the authority and tasks of the Department of Dwelling Affairs within the Ministry of Public Works and Settlement have been assigned to TOKI.

In addition to the housing policies implemented by TOKI since November 2002 when AKP came into power, the 58<sup>th</sup>, the 59<sup>th</sup> and the 60<sup>th</sup> Turkish Republic Governments<sup>164</sup> have each issued Emergency Action Plans for Housing and Urban Development. These plans have been expected to solve basic social, economic and administrative problems of the country. The plans generally aimed to address the *gecekondu* issue in a different manner and to have low income / poor people (as the Roma – if qualifying) become homeowners “by paying instalments as it would pay rent” (Bayraktar 2010).

TOKI was established in 1984, reporting to the Prime Minister. Its aim is to regulate the housing sector, prevent the expansion of *gecekondu* and provide sustainable solutions to housing shortages. Since 40% of the buildings in Turkey are considered to be “shanty” and 67% lacking settlement permit, TOKI estimates that “within the prospective 20 years approximately 6,7 million housing units shall be demolished and reconstructed throughout the country” (TOKI website 2017). Idris Güllüce, the Minister of Environment and Urbanization in 2014 stated during a public event that, in the past, “buildings have been built without master plans, but Turkey is different now. Our citizens are angry at the urban regeneration, [but] now we do it with the people not against them, like in 1950’s. The way buildings were built was like dark humour, but that was in the past”<sup>165</sup>. It might be that the aim is to

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<sup>164</sup> All re-elected AKP.

<sup>165</sup> Notes, Urban Regeneration Seminar, Chamber of Commerce, Istanbul, 12.05.2014

build better and create modern spaces for inhabitants, however especially when it comes to the poor and the Roma who used to live in poor neighbourhoods, these spaces do not fit necessarily with their lifestyle.

TOKI became the main producer of market-rate public housing in Turkey, aspiring to respond to the general housing needs of Turkey. TOKI claims that its projects help to transform the “slum and shanty settlement areas”, but also “prevent formation of new slum areas”, by building houses for the low-income groups, following “a comprehensive policy toward supporting modern urbanization in cooperation with local administrations” (TOKI Website 2017). Social housing projects in the form of municipally owned subsidized rental homes do not exist in Turkey and therefore social housing policy is generally associated with the delivery of mass housing through TOKI<sup>166</sup>. What can be called “social housing” in Turkey is a programme implemented by TOKI. Beneficiaries of such social housing programmes have to make down payments at the beginning of construction (the “poor groups” being exempted from this) and to pay monthly instalments to designated bank accounts. Monthly instalments for poor citizens are increased two times a year, the maturities of the loan payments being set as of 10-15-20 years in average, depending on the financial capabilities of the target group. Accordingly, title deeds are issued after full repayment of the debts. The social housing schemes of TOKI target the low (23,01% of the projects) and the middle-income people (40,55%) “who cannot own a housing unit under the existing market conditions”. Additionally, a ratio of 15,08% is envisaged in the framework of the urban transformation / regeneration projects (Ibid).

In spite of its scope to provide “affordable housing solutions”, in practice TOKI’s houses seem not to be accessible to families sitting on or just above the poverty line (Elliott 2010:22). Affordable housing is defined generally as housing available for purchase or rent at a market value and accessible to the majority of the population (Idem 2010:23). The Research Institute of the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DISK-AR) calculated the hunger threshold and poverty line in Turkey for the month of November 2013, for a family of four, at a monthly 1,121 TL (approx. 408 Euro) and respectively 3,544 TL (approx. 1,291

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<sup>166</sup> There is however one type of public rental flats owned by public institutions called “*lojman*”. These are built as (exclusive) housing aid for workers / employees of the state / public servants - usually military and civil servants.



Euro). Consequently, those situated under the hunger threshold are considered under the category of the poor. In its website, TOKI describes the “low-income group and the poor” as being those “without any means to purchase housing under the current market conditions; having a maximum net income of 2.600 TL or a maximum net income of 3.100 TL in Istanbul” (where income can be higher than other places) “as the monthly household income”, which is much more than the DISK-AR calculated poverty line. Those categorized in the “poor group” would be able to receive, according to TOKI, “houses with an area of 45–65 m<sup>2</sup>, with instalments starting from 100 TL” to be paid over a period of 25 years. Those categorized as “low-income group” would be able to receive “houses with an area of 65-87 m<sup>2</sup>”, with 6.000 TL as down payment and instalments of 300 TL starting from the delivery of the house, over periods of 15 to 20 years.

Even though these instalments seem quite low, they can constitute significant financial burdens for the residents who were able to “offset the disadvantage of not having regular employment by saving on the cost of accommodation, and in some cases resorting to informal means of tapping into the city’s electricity and water networks” while living in the *gecekondu* neighbourhoods (Karaman 2012:9). A concrete example from the case studies of this research is the situation of the “200 Houses” scheme whose inhabitants have been facing difficulties to adapt to the apartment blocks provided by the authorities and to cope with the payments imposed. A letter<sup>167</sup> sent on behalf of the Roma, in 2013, by the President of the Management Board of the “264<sup>168</sup> Houses TOKI Compound” and the *mukhtar* [headman] of the neighbourhood to Prime Minister Erdoğan thanked TOKI management and workers for enabling the Roma to “become owners” of their “dream houses”, for helping them to “give up on the makeshift houses and tents” they were “used to live in” and for making them “owners of luxury apartments”. However, the letter also highlighted the fact that the Roma faced “great distress” about the payments they had to make to the banks, because they did “not have a stable-income lifestyle”. Eventually, since they could not cope<sup>169</sup> with the imposed monthly instalments and utilities costs, some families received eviction notices and others suffered from “mental depression”

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<sup>167</sup> Copy of the document provided by the manager of “200 Houses” from the side of the municipality.

<sup>168</sup> 264 is the number of apartments built. However, this housing scheme is called “200 Houses” [Tr. 200 Evler] in all other official documents, in publications / media and on the signposts of the neighbourhood.

<sup>169</sup> The Roma who moved in the “200 Houses” are shoe shiners, cleaners, paper and scrap collectors or coachmen and the insecure income does not always allow for proper planning of their family needs.

because of the situation.

One of the criticisms regarding the mass-housing projects provided by TOKI is that they are built at the periphery of urban areas, which is a major obstacle for low-income people to access their workplaces (due to the distance, time and cost of the daily commutes) and other social networks that they cannot benefit from. This situation concludes at times with householders vacating their dwellers and moving back to the areas in the city where they used to previously live. Nevertheless, Elliott argues that “TOKI should not take full responsibility for failing to reach the poorest families” (2010:66) since authorities have to balance the provision of “earthquake safe housing”<sup>170</sup> and the re-using of more central squatter land, in order to offset development costs and affordability of the mass housing projects.

Since the 1990s, the government introduced new regulations and gave virtually unlimited authority to TOKI in city planning. Particularly in Istanbul – the biggest metropolis in the country, these developments are considered “concrete manifestations of the adoption of a neoliberal approach, in which urban space is perceived primarily in terms of its sales value” (Kıyak İgin & Tan 2010:48). TOKI therefore is responsible for urban renewal but is seen also as the institution responsible for “urban clearance projects, which intend to replace poor, ethnically marked communities” and rescale the dynamics of the urban environments (Ibid). Increasingly, it becomes a trend to relocate the poor from the informal settlements, including the *gecekondu* situated in more or less central locations, towards the margins of the city, while luxury compounds or shopping malls are built in their place. In the case of the Roma, the plots allocated by the authorities for their housing projects tend to be less valuable, usually on the outskirts. During one of the interviews of June 2013 with the Governor of Samsun, he explained how he was just about to make a good “trade”, by selling the plot of land near a Roma neighbourhood, initially allocated to a housing project for the Roma affected by the floods, to a company that would buy the land at a much higher price to build some industrial facilities. The Governor preferred to sell that piece of land, which would have helped the Roma families to relocate but to remain in the same neighbourhood.

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<sup>170</sup> A reality is that, from a tectonic point of view, Istanbul is one of the most at risk cities in the world. Recognizing this vulnerability, in 2006, Istanbul Provincial Administration started the Istanbul Seismic Mitigation and Emergency Preparedness Project (ISMEP) with financing from the World Bank to strengthen local disaster response and emergency management capacity with reinforcing of overpasses, underpasses and viaducts and school buildings. Web: <http://www.ipkb.gov.tr/en/Anasayfa>

His aim was to gain more money for the administration and buy land to relocate them elsewhere towards the margins of the city, dislocating in this way the Roma families from their environment. Reports mention the fact that “developers, speculators and the elite are the main beneficiaries of the TOKI projects” (AGFE 2009). Additionally, municipality construction companies are also active in housing delivery, often in cooperation with TOKI, as it has become common knowledge that being a “TOKI contractor” can be “a profitable privilege”<sup>171</sup> (Letsch 2011b). It is claimed also that most of these companies were founded during the AKP administration and that they have links with AKP and different Islamic business associations (Karaman 2012:7), fact for which suspicions of corruption<sup>172</sup> prevail.

Since coming into power in 2002, the AKP Governments “started looking for new ways to market the city” and, apparently, “their adoption of the neo-liberal discourse found a perfect fit in projects preparing the city for showcase on the global stage” (Keyder 2009). Property rights and land demands, associated with globalization, further limit the access of the poor to land ownership in the major cities of Turkey. The poor, “squeezed on valuable land on urban areas” are forced to move “into peripheral or marginal locations” (Allen & Thomas 2000:432). From this point of view, cities can become places “marked by processes of exclusion, segregation, and repression” (Mitchell 1995; Ruddick 1996; Smith 1997). Moreover, as Munck argued, the interaction between one social group’s poverty, its social exclusion levels and its residential segregation sets up “a dynamic of concentrated deprivation and disadvantage” (2005:102).

#### *5.2.1.4. Municipalities as Market Facilitators*

Turkey subscribed to the global trends of developing new methods of governance, “in order to negotiate new economic and territorial identities in the urban areas”, through increasingly “competition-oriented” and “innovation-oriented

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<sup>171</sup> A Turkish respondent interviewed by a foreign newspaper claimed that: “Working for TOKI is a blessing for a construction company – there is just no end to the work” (...). “We have barely noticed that there was a financial crisis” (Letsch 2011b)

<sup>172</sup> The Turkish media signalized different ties of politicians, their families and the business environment, especially regarding the field of construction. Srivastava & Harvey (2014) cited the author of the book (2008) *Media, Culture, Money and Power in Istanbul*, Mustafa Sönmez, who claims that the “megaprojects” of AKP in Turkey are “an opportunity for corruption in areas such as building permits. ...And of course, if you are a friend of Erdoğan or a relative, there are some advantages”. The article also lists a number of companies ran by relatives of Erdoğan which undertook different major public works projects (building of bridges and airports etc.) in Turkey (2014b).

policies” (Uzun 2010:759). Through legal changes regarding the designation of renewal areas and implementation of urban transformation projects, urban areas have become source of capital accumulation for various investors and transformed local authorities, particularly municipalities, into entrepreneurs (Dinçer 2011:59). The municipalities have taken a “proactive role”, becoming enablers, clients or partners (Özdemir & Eraydın 2012:5) in the process of transforming the city. This model, however, shares the pitfalls of other entrepreneurial forms of urban governance, which fail significantly in terms of accountability, transparency and representation (Ibid).

The Municipality Law of 1984 changed the municipal system by instating Greater / Metropolitan Municipalities [Tr. Büyükşehir Belediyesi], with new financial resources and additional agencies formerly attached to the central administration. Laws no 3194 and 3030 gave also local authorities the right to implement their own plans in regards to housing. These new municipality laws introduced in 2004 and 2005 respectively further gave municipalities and especially greater municipalities more power, allowing them to expand their land property and to take quicker decisions on development. Consequently, this made it easier for municipalities “to establish, and / or create partnerships and collaborate with private companies” (Bartu & Kolluoğlu 2008:9). These changes led to the municipalities becoming market facilitators, as they started to privatize various municipal services (e.g. transportation, housing, provision of natural gas etc.) and to manage tendering procedures for related projects (Bartu & Kolluoğlu 2008:8).

Additionally, the 2004 and 2005 laws gave municipalities the responsibility to prepare and respond to natural disasters and outlined the legal framework for the urban transformation programmes, which gave them “the authority to designate, plan and implement” such projects (Bartu & Kolluoğlu 2008:9). Kadir Topbaş, architect by profession and Mayor of Istanbul since 2004<sup>173</sup>, explained in a conference speech in 2014 that “earthquake is an opportunity for urbanization to be done right”<sup>174</sup>, referring to the works that need to be done to prevent major damages by potential disasters. Although this statement might be valid, however a series of controversies and lawsuits followed due to the fact that some areas have been declared seismically

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<sup>173</sup> Kadir Topbaş resigned from his position as mayor of Istanbul in 2017, after certain pressures and disagreements with AKP.

<sup>174</sup> Notes, Urban Regeneration Seminar, Chamber of Commerce, Istanbul, 12.05.2014

unsafe while expert reports showed otherwise. In practice, urban regeneration, with its demolitions, displacement and reconstruction, which is supposed to be done in the most at-risk locations, happens to be done also in areas of minor risk, exploiting valuable land and relocating disadvantaged communities, away from the centres of the cities. For example, it was proved by experts that the high-risk areas specified in the Master Plan for Disaster Prevention, elaborated by JICA – Japan International Cooperation Agency at the request of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality,<sup>175</sup> do not correspond in proportion of 72.9% to the areas delineated in the risk map defined by the Ministry of Environment and Urbanism (Özmen 2015). Different protests and court cases, including from the side of the communities with large Roma population, have highlighted the injustices done by the municipal authorities by allowing demolitions in areas of lesser risk or no seismic risk, while large high-risk areas wait for intervention. One example is Gaziosmanpaşa in Istanbul, more specifically the Yenidoğan and Sarıgöl neighbourhoods, where a large Roma community lives. The area has been declared risky and planned for demolition, according to the 15.12.2013 6306 Disaster Law of the Committee of Ministers. The inhabitants have contested the decision and asked for additional expertize, since the area has been initially declared “safe” by JICA and the Istanbul Municipality. The demolition decision has been put on hold until the receipt of the expert report (Vardar 2014). Another case regarding the rigour with which the risk zones are designated is the one of Istanbul district of Tozkoparan. In this case, Turkey's highest court found that the decision of being declared “risk area” had been based on the inspection of just 14 of the area’s 5,500 buildings, and that these were “visual inspections, not scientific” (Lepeska 2014). Nevertheless, experts consider that some urban renewal projects are debatable and what is “presented as a remedy to earthquakes” has in fact “the same economic and social damage”, as they lead to “forced loss of a person's home, work, and social ties in a neighbourhood” (Letsch 2011c).

In 2009, the UN, through a mission of AGFE - Advisory Group on Forced Evictions to the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT, also criticized the fact that municipalities in Turkey facilitate the work of TOKI, getting the land vacated and

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<sup>175</sup> Agreement no 2000/1885 approved by the Committee of Ministers on 22.01.2001 and published in the Official Gazete no 24295. The project started in March 2001 and was completed in September 2002, estimating the potential damage of a 7.5 or 7.7 earthquake in Istanbul. The report applied its analysis on 750,000 buildings, 3,040,000 homes and on a total estimated population of 9 million (although at the time the population of Istanbul was estimated at 14 million).

handed over for development, abusing the lack of clarity of laws. By demolishing good quality houses or structures that could have been easily repaired (mostly in the *gecekondu* settlements), as well as by evicting vulnerable populations, Turkey has disregarded international agreements to which it has subscribed<sup>176</sup>.

### ***5.2.2. Neoliberal Urbanization: Implications of Urban Transformation***

#### *5.2.2.1 Selling the “Soul” of the City*

Turkey adopted neo-liberal urbanisation and housing policies, which, according to Keyder, find a “perfect fit in projects preparing cities for showcase on the global stage” (2009). The state has been privatizing state-owned industrial and public buildings, forests, rivers and informally urbanized land, and created “a set of laws to expropriate property from the current owners of valuable inner-city neighbourhoods”, trying to safeguard in this manner the success of its urban development plans (Cavuşoğlu & Strutz 2014).

Istanbul is a particularly useful illustration of the rush for gaining global status “by successfully integrating in the neoliberal globalization process” (İçli & Özçelik 2012:4). Different policy makers, analysts and scholars argue that the housing sector is an important tool in addressing the present global crisis, by pushing economies forward. Different analysts consider that any economy that focuses on construction and particularly housing “is making an enormously significant contribution to economic growth, environment and employment” (Business Turkey 2011). During a 2014 speech<sup>177</sup> at the Chamber of Commerce in Istanbul, its Vice Chairman of the Board stated that “construction is the locomotive of our economy” and that, in 2013 alone, 2 million people worked in the construction sector. Since the

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<sup>176</sup> One of these is the UN commitment for MDGs up to 2015 which included the MDG 7, target 11, referring to an approach to slums – housing / land tenure / infrastructure. This target mentions the fact that “Between 2000 and 2014, more than 320 million people living in slums gained access to improved water sources, improved sanitation facilities, or durable or less crowded housing, thereby exceeding the MDG target. More than 880 million people are estimated to be living in slums today, compared to 792 million in 2000 and 689 million in 1990”. Moreover, the MDGs set beyond 2015, at Target 7.D, specify the aim to achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020 (UN MDG 2015).

<sup>177</sup> Notes, Urban Regeneration Seminar, Chamber of Commerce, Istanbul, 12.05.2014

1980s, there has been a “spectacular increase in the number of hotels<sup>178</sup>, shopping malls<sup>179</sup> and office buildings” (Bartu & Kolluoğlu 2008:12) in the major cities of Turkey. Moreover, nowadays, tourism seems to have gained another facet by expanding its targets from historical to commercial, having in mind the influx of tourists from the Middle East coming for shopping mainly to Istanbul.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the housing sector in Turkey grew remarkably. However, the lack of an accessible housing loan system, due to economic instability, prevented the low and middle-income<sup>180</sup> families from benefitting (CBRT 2008). Some consider that Istanbul already ended up with a credit market bubble and excess real estate (office buildings, shopping centres, and middle-class residential complexes with long unoccupied periods) that could lead to further economic difficulties. Notwithstanding, others consider that there is still a danger regarding the fact that a potential “cessation of new construction and land development will rob the city of its major motor of growth in terms of absorbing investment and creating employment, leading to an unavoidable period of relative stagnation” (Keyder 2009).

In the past decade, the negative socio-economic impact of neoliberal market-oriented urban policies and practices has been increasingly evident in the world (Harvey 2007; Swyngedouw et al. 2002) and “the biggest destruction” said to be caused by neoliberalism is visible in the major cities of Turkey as well (İçli & Özçelik 2012:5). Ever since the 1990s, the rise of property values in historical city centres has begun to reorient the policies targeting neglected cultural assets and, alongside the growing tourism sector, these areas stirred the interest of investment companies who aimed to build mainly luxury facilities (Enlil 2000). Rapid urban development is linked both to an enhancement of income inequalities, as well as to improved standards of living, higher life expectancy and literacy, as well as better fulfilment of basic needs. Urban settlements offer a better capacity to accommodate economic activities for more people, even though these do not result necessarily in more equitable distribution of wealth (Tacoli 2012). Urban transformation has been perceived as both destroyer and saviour in the regeneration of rundown areas. Some

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<sup>178</sup> In Istanbul only, the bedroom capacity of the five-star hotels in the 1980s was 2,000. In the 1990s this capacity was expanded to 6,786, and another 50% increase occurred in the 2000s when the number of luxurious hotel beds in the city reached 10,199.21 (Bartu & Kolluoğlu 2008:12)

<sup>179</sup> If in the 1990s, Istanbul had only ten shopping centres, between 2000 and 2008, an additional 47 malls have been constructed. By the end of 2010, it was estimated that Istanbul had a total of 122 shopping malls with a floor space of nearly 4 million square meters (Ibid)

<sup>180</sup> According to a research of the Central Bank of Turkey, only the top 10% of the population is able to access mortgage credit, hence only 1.8 million households (CBRT 2008).

urban regeneration projects started under the argument of protecting the old settlements and cultural heritage. However, the emergent high demand of urban land has brought pressure on the low amount of publicly owned space (Özdemir & Eraydın 2012:6). Presently, it can be easily observed how urban Turkey is gradually changing and how it is becoming a “giant construction site, where skyscrapers, mega projects and urban renewal projects” are implemented tirelessly (Adanalı 2014). According to TOKI, in Turkey, approximately 6.5 million of the housing stock needs “renovation, that is, demolition and rebuilding” and up to 14 million houses need “handling”<sup>181</sup> (TOKI Website 2017).

This patterns set by the government in Turkey attracts both national and foreign investors (Uzun 2005). Kenna argued that, generally, governments start projects that require “mass evictions”; all for the sake of profit or for “creating world-class cities” (2008:421). However, this “development” tends to accentuate the socio-economic polarisation of the society. In Turkey also, altogether with the incorporation of neoliberalism in the market relations, many changes have been encountered in the structure of the economy and “new forms of social stratification, urban residential segregation, as well as new types of cultural dynamics have emerged” (Buğra & Keyder 2003:21). The prices of real estate properties have been rising continuously and the lower-income groups have been displaced and sent further towards the outskirts. As a Brookings Institution report pointed out, in these cases, “higher income households replace lower income residents of a neighbourhood, changing the essential character and flavour of that neighbourhood” (Kennedy & Leonard 2001:5).

Those who have been forced to leave have been losing part of their social self and the safety network of their community. A Roma woman evicted from her *gecekondu* neighbourhood in Küçükbakkalköy due to urban regeneration explained how her old place gave her a sense of “strength” and losing that environment left her powerless:

.... There was a community; there was unity; now, when everyone split up, is the same as a child split up from his mother and father, that is how; It’s like we are orphans; ... I feel like an orphan, like a poor fellow, crammed on an edge.

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<sup>181</sup> The same source also mentions that an additional 6.5 million buildings “will be demolished and rebuilt within an average period of 20 years” due to disaster risks.



Similarly, a Roma woman describes the loss of her “neighbourhood” as if she “lost a creature”. Disregarding this reality, authorities seem not to recognize the inhabitants of these old neighbourhoods as “real owners”, even if proved by documents, taking “the attitude that they are disposable, and should be relocated to the many houses available elsewhere in Istanbul” (Dinçer 2011:59).

In Turkey, the urban development projects implying regeneration and reconstruction started to be controversial since they transform and, at times, destroy the historic fabric of the city, apparently just for catering “to the interests of high-income groups, severely limiting public access to these areas” (Bartu & Kolluoğlu 2008:11). Urban development induces the “social and spatial segregation” of the city (Bartu & Kolluoğlu 2008:6). Wealthy private segregated compounds started to appear as well. Moreover, the style of building homes clustered in compounds, points to a conservative lack of relation with the urban life, families choosing to be secluded into the privacy of their homes. Bartu & Kolluoğlu argue that this “urban fear and the need for security”, through “social and spatial isolation”, become “the markers of a new urbanity” (2008:1). To a great extent, the inhabitants of these new gated residential compounds, which grew in number since 2005, are mostly middle class conservatives which rose during the AKP era and exhibit a certain accepted isolation, trying to preserve their lifestyle which the the cosmopolit “city” is prone to threaten. Therefore, urban development and gentrification re-designs the “particular relationship between space and power” (Secor 2004:360), re-creates social dynamics and re-defines identities. Cities developing fast become “places where not only wealth but also poverty is reproduced, socio-cultural, political, economic and spatial dissolutions come up sharply and deepen” (İçli & Özçelik 2012:5). Urban development, as such conducted in the major Turkish cities, have repercussions in terms of dramatic changes in the urban and social landscape of the city, increasing the value of urban land, while displacing a significant number of people (Bartu & Kolluoğlu 2008:11).

The plans for transforming urban areas in Turkey into rich, modern and presumably “safe” cities have been heavily criticized by the Turkish civil society. They claim that the on-going makeover of urban areas and their rush for growth is in fact a rush for fast profit “for the privileged while ignoring the majority” (Lepeska 2014). Ümit Özcan, the General Secretary of Turkey’s Chamber of Urban Planners stated that the Government is giving “unbelievable rights to TOKI and municipal

mayors” (Christie-Miller & Lewis 2011) who decide over reshaping the city physically and socially. The public calls anecdotally TOKI’s urban regeneration project as “victims creation project” (Medyabar 2013). A UN-Habitat report stated that “TOKI is removed from the people for whom it designs and builds” (AGFE 2009) since the responsibility for the “transformation” is handed to the real estate developers, the human factor not being entirely taken into consideration. The same report writes that authorities have not envisaged a “process through which beneficiaries’ concerns” are taken into account and fed “into the design and construction processes”. Similarly, collective negotiations seem not to be allowed, only individual families being entitled to negotiate with officials. This is especially intimidating for the most vulnerable: the owners of the property “are informed at the beginning that they can either agree with the municipality or their properties will be expropriated” (AGFE 2009:2). Speaking about the lack of proper consultation when the urban regeneration project started in Sulukule / Istanbul, a local Roma leader declared that people were not prepared and not properly informed about implications: “We did not know what urban transformation meant” (Gül 2011). During a visit to the families settled in a temporary shelter in the former demolished neighbourhood of Küçükbakkalköy, one of the women interviewed responded rather rhetorically to the question about the reasons of her home being demolished:

“Why did this happen? We don’t know”.

Prof.Uğur Tanyeli from Istanbul Technical University considers that “those who want to renew cities in Turkey prioritize buildings over people” (Letsch 2011a). Scholars argue that social policies that would foster social diversity and care for disadvantaged people have experienced gradual downgrading in Turkey (Lelandais 2015). Mücella Yapici of the Istanbul Chamber of Architects pointed out that homelessness “never used to be a serious issue in Istanbul” and that “the demolitions<sup>182</sup> and evictions led to a dramatic increase of people with nowhere to go”, many people becoming more vulnerable (Letsch 2011c). People who were dispersed after the demolition of the *gecekondu* in Küçükbakkalköy spoke about the problem of being left without an alternative and to be living in a limbo state. Those who owned houses sold them and left. Others, especially those who were renting or

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<sup>182</sup> During 2004 – 2008, a total of 11,543 units were demolished in Istanbul, this number being considered the highest record of any period (Lelandais 2015).

lived in joint households with their extended families, remained on the streets or had to find places to rent again. A Roma man, head of household displaced from Küçükbakkalköy due to urban regeneration in 2013 and left without alternative shelter hoped that the authorities would turn their attention on them:

If they could give us a house, even for rent, it would be enough; it might be far – it does not matter. Be it so! But just to have a home.

However, being poor, having no steady income and nevertheless being visibly<sup>183</sup> Roma makes it difficult to meet the standards and requirements of the realtors. Renting a place is an issue for many Roma, not only due to lack of resources, but due to prejudices of the society towards them. A young man who lives with his mother in a tent near a construction site in the former demolished area of Küçükbakkalköy explained during an interview conducted in 2014 how the majority of those they come into contact with treat them:

They degrade us... You cannot find a warm behaviour from anyone anymore... They do not give us houses for rent; is hard to find. We are Gypsies so they do not prefer us.

In the same year, in another inner city small slum<sup>184</sup> made of old houses on the point of being demolished, improvised barracks and tents, among dirt and rats, piles of garbage which waited to be sorted and paper scrap to be sold, another young Roma man gave his understanding of the situation and their prospects:

They send us elsewhere; ... there is prejudice; ...they'll demolish here either when the schools will go on holidays or at the end of the month; is uncertain; ... we pay rent but we struggle to pay it; we live here 6 people together since 4 or 5 years.

In the same settlement, a Roma woman spoke about her house being demolished and what came afterwards:

Our previous home was demolished. Believe us... we lived in a tiny tent with 4 children. I just gave birth then. I had high blood sugar because of sorrow and I still did not recover since... We are renting since 5 years now. My husband is also ill. We have no job; we collect

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<sup>183</sup> The “visible” stereotypical Roma are the people with obvious poor appearance, numerous family members, “traditional” clothing of women wearing *shalwars* and sometimes particular accent.

<sup>184</sup> The place was dismantled / demolished in January 2015, during a very cold and wet period. The media and NGOs raised concerns over the families, which were left on the streets with very few belongings and improper clothing for the cold weather. A temporary solution for their accommodation came from the authorities only months after.

from garbage, what can we do? We hardly pay our rent, sister.

When asked about their destination after the imminent demolition, having in mind that they will most probably not be offered an alternative by the authorities, being tenants, the woman answered that they will look for a house they could afford around the area and, if not, they will just pitch a tent somewhere. All accounts and conditions encountered on the ground point to the fact that a proper urban renewal process must consider the rights and needs of the affected populations, their level of education and awareness, customs and traditions, profile and economic condition, as well as “satisfaction with the region” where they would be or would have to relocate (İçli & Özçelik 2012:12).

In line with the arguments about neoliberal policies brought up in the theoretical framework of this thesis, in section 1.2.1, Kenna explains that the present reorientation of housing laws, policy and rights is the effect of global neoliberalism (2008:408). The 2005 Law on Renewal, the amendments of the 2004 Law on Housing Development and the 2005 Law of Local Authorities for instance gave significant powers over the regeneration of urban settlements to municipalities and TOKI (Dinçer 2011:4). According to the Law on Renewal, local authorities are the sole decision-makers, in the context in which renewal/regeneration projects refer only to the physical environment and not to their socio-economic, cultural and political implications. Article 4 of the Law on Renewal states that reaching a mutual agreement should constitute the basis for any attempt to remove existing tenants and demolish or expropriate existing structures, however, it also allows the imposition of its own decisions if an agreement cannot be reached (Dinçer 2010:6). Similarly, Article 3 of the Law on Expropriation authorizes the sale of the appropriated property to third parties after a renewal project has been completed. Here, also, local authorities enjoy an absolute advantage in the negotiations with landowners and tenants, the situation becoming extremely controversial in terms of conflicting interests and notions of overall public welfare. Article 7 of the Law No 5366 on the “Preservation by Renovation and Utilisation by Revitalising of Deteriorated Immovable Historical and Cultural Properties” stresses on one very important factor which is participation. However, in practice, the concerned parties are only informed<sup>185</sup> about the projected outcomes of the renewal process and not coherently

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<sup>185</sup> Bruce Cahan, president of Washington-based Urban Logic Inc., speaking for Hürriyet Daily News

and consistently involved in the process, as it will be explained further.

#### *5.2.2.2. Neoliberal Redistribution of Power in the Urban Context*

The prevalence of neoliberal values within the AKP Government is associated with escalating social divisions, existential loss of control, and cultural vulnerability (Aksoy 2010; Eraydin 2006). These processes affect especially the life of vulnerable urban residents whose right to the city is challenged. According to Atkinson & Bridge (2005), gentrification suggests particular power relationships and struggle for urban space. Urban regeneration becomes an urban re-distribution of power, recreating new resources of wealth while further disempowering the poor. Moreover, Castells sustains that while global cities attempt to “connect externally” with the rest of the world, they are internally “disconnecting local populations that are either functionally unnecessary or socially disruptive” (1996:404, cited in Munck 2005:63), which in urban Turkey’s case are the Roma, the Kurds and other internally displaced, migrants or (more recently) the refugees from Syria.

Ultimately, the provision of housing, as Turner argues, becomes “an arena for struggle between individual autonomy and powerful governmental institutions” (Peattie & Aldrete-Haas 1981:161). The manner in which urban regeneration affects the Roma illustrates the lack of capacity of Roma to negotiate with power and to cope with the policies of the state, which target them directly or indirectly.

#### *5.2.2.3 The Hidden Disempowered and Excluded*

Some scholars argue that the reasons for which the *gecekondu* areas and the pockets of poverty and slums inhabited by poor and migrants within the cities “become particularly attractive for redevelopment” are the “legal ambiguities in their property regimes”, as well as their “perceived status as centres of crime and decay” (Tok & Oğuz 2011:8). Therefore, through urban transformation projects, some consider that irregular urbanization is stopped and that “the spaces that provide shelter for criminal and terrorist organizations” have a chance to be destroyed (Bartu & Kolluoğlu 2008:14). It is in fact a reality that some *gecekondu* areas, as well as the

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& Economic Review, argued that TOKI is doing everything by itself and that, instead, it should “do everything with neighbourhood residents” (Şenerdem 2011)

Roma neighbourhoods within the *gecekondu* settlements, are seen as “no-go” areas<sup>186</sup>. Through these perceptions, invisible barriers and a certain “social distance” are put between different communities (Bartu & Kolluoğlu 2008:37). The inhabitants of these spaces, including the Roma, suffer as a result of the bad reputation of the settlements they inhabit and the blame the society exhibits towards their communities (İçli & Özçelik 2012:8).

However, relocating the people from these settlements does not always overcome the exclusion they face. Their vulnerability is invisibilized, hidden from the eyes of the city. A Roma man, relocated to Taşoluk (after the urban regeneration project in the old area of Sulukule) towards the outskirts of Istanbul into a new neighbourhood of apartment blocks,<sup>187</sup>, narrated how the stigma of their “origins” followed them to the new place:

Our neighbours did not talk to us for months. They thought we were thieves or prostitutes. We had to deal with prejudices and also adapt ourselves to the new environment. We had to drop our habits and customs. In our former neighbourhood, we used to stay outside for hours, chatting. Now we cannot do this.

Similarly, the Roma in Samsun who were moved into the “200 Houses” compound continue to struggle to adapt. The Mayor of Samsun complained during an interview in 2013 that some of the inhabitants needed to be “educated” to act responsibly “as citizens”, since he considered that they did not have the “culture” of living in the apartment blocks, nor the “discipline” to cope with the regimen of payments for house instalments and utility bills. Some of the Roma living in the “200

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<sup>186</sup> I personally faced similar reactions from friends or taxi drivers who had to take me to the neighbourhoods where I was doing research in Turkey. Since there is the (most of the time preconceived) idea that one cannot enter freely in Roma neighbourhoods, I was told that I might be in danger, because the Roma might attack me for being a stranger / foreigner and might want money from me. Most of the time, my target for finding groups of people in the same spot (especially during the cold season) were the *kahvehanes* – places exclusively frequented by men, but great place to find the leaders of the community – those that would “allow” my interventions in the community but places where the presence of a woman would not be seen as appropriate. Since my first arrival in Turkey, in 2002, I did my field work almost always alone in many Roma neighbourhoods in Istanbul, Edirne, Izmir, Bursa etc., sometimes in neighbourhoods known for illegal activities, including prostitution and drug dealing. However, there was not a single time that I felt or been threatened in any way or when people have not been cooperative with me.

<sup>187</sup> The historic neighbourhood was known for hosting some of the “entertainment” attractions of the city: the Roma musicians, the belly dancers, but also prostitution, drug dealers and users. It is reported that the “entertainment houses” were forcibly closed in 1992, in Sulukule, “on grounds of prostitution, immorality and thievery”. Before Sulukule was designated as urban regeneration area in 2005, the Prime Minister at that time, Tayyip Erdoğan, announced that his Government “will save Sulukule from its state of aberration” (Kıyak İngin 2008)

Houses” scheme in Samsun, who have been relocated from the former *gecekondu* settlement in the apartments, say that before it “used to be better”. They had a better life because they had work; now they have to pay for everything, including the houses they live in. For many, however, the eventuality of “owning” the house is almost an abstract concept and a burden from the point of view that it diminishes their income every month with the instalments they have to pay and the utility bills. Since some families failed to pay the instalments, either the running water or the electricity has been cut-off. During the field visit in the “200 Houses” neighbourhood, the apartments of those who had their water and electricity disconnected were in very bad shape. Additionally, the radiators inside flats and on the staircases have been dismantled and sold. The fact that they lacked steady income put them in danger of being evicted from the apartments.

The Mayor of Istanbul, as well, declared in 2014 that “there are people who do not have a relationship with the city – people that are not urbanite” and for whom new alternatives need to be created, otherwise these “deep differences of inhabiting” would “create problems”<sup>188</sup>. Those poor families – including Roma – who were used to living all their lives in the former type of houses, with minimal costs, who have been relocated and given housing alternatives, find adaptation nearly impossible due to the structural challenges that this change implies. For many, relocation does not change much, since it means only a relocation of their poverty. Housing provided alone and not integrated with other programmes does not save them from difficulties.

In the case of urban regeneration, construction companies receive their contracts along with the responsibility to deal with the further displaced population, however nothing obliges them to conduct proper information and awareness-raising sessions about what regeneration would mean. However, some municipalities provide different forms of relief aid and temporary welfare to the displaced and relocated residents, fact which, in their vulnerable state, keeps them from protesting. In this manner, the implementation of urban renewal projects in poor neighbourhoods is smoothed out through a “moral” component of a moderated and charitable Muslim society. Karaman considers that the AKP has been gaining support from different sections of the society, by craftily appealing both to the “emergent Islamic capitalist class through lucrative contracts and business-friendly

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<sup>188</sup> Notes, Urban Regeneration Seminar, Chamber of Commerce, Istanbul, 12.05.2014

reforms”, as well as to the “urban poor through gracious gestures ingrained in traditional Islamic community values and morality” (2012:8). Regardless of what the poor in the urban areas have been put through in the context of urban regeneration, AKP is still largely perceived as “the party of the marginalized and the oppressed” (Karaman 2012:9), due to its welfare provision orientation.

Small gestures of relief provision from the side of the authorities postpone intentions of reaction. Most of the displaced families in Küçükbakkalköy had very little reaction towards their displacement. Although people complain in private, they would generally not launch themselves in legal battles. Many people I came in contact with however have praise and gratitude for the relief goods received from the municipality, while living in tents and barracks without prospects of sustainable shelter. The displaced are the most vulnerable who would not likely have the resources or the knowledge to start legal demarches against the authorities. Moreover, the laws and regulations of urban regeneration are difficult to interpret and the chances of winning a case are usually extremely lengthy and very limited. Alongside their entangled – and ungraspable for many – procedures and rules, the urban regeneration projects are done in a way and on a scale that seems “too divisive for the local populace to provide a basis for widespread collective mobilisation” (Loopmans & Dirckx 2012:112 cited in Karaman 2012:6).

The Council of Europe, the intergovernmental organization Turkey has been a member of since 1949, in its Recommendation Rec(2005)4 on improving the housing conditions of Roma and Travellers in Europe, mentions the instruments to be adopted in order to ensure “effective protection against unlawful forced and collective evictions and to control strictly the circumstances in which legal evictions may be carried out”. Besides providing “appropriate alternative accommodation”, the standards followed by the authorities should include “consultation with the community or individual concerned, reasonable notice, provision of information, a guarantee that the eviction will be carried out in a reasonable manner, effective legal remedies and free or low cost legal assistance for the persons concerned” (CoE 2005). The UN also recommends that anti-eviction laws should be passed (by all countries) in order to protect the vulnerable, who should also be given training about their rights to the city, to housing, land and regarding non-eviction (UN HABITAT 2003:35).



Relocation is at times done unannounced, by use of force, and with no visible empathy for the people affected or openness regarding the legal demarches that they might be entitled to pursue. One family evicted from Küçükbakkalköy, having their house demolished and living in an improvised shelter in the same area, at the time of the interview in 2013, considered that the employees of the municipality or of the contractor company the municipality hired for the project, as well as the police forces who intervened, most probably “did not even feel bad” when they came “with the excavator and tore down the building completely”. An older woman of the same family added:

...As it was not enough, - we had our daughter’s dowry inside – God is our witness – two trunks with printed cloth, curtains - ... they collected them all and threw them in the car. They even took the mattress from under my child; they destroyed everything and did not even let us collect our IDs from inside the house. What kind of humanity is this?

The interests and interventions of international bodies regarding the urban regeneration-led evictions and displacement of the poor, including the Roma, appeared more vividly in the early years of AKP rule. Later on, even though evictions continued and spread across Turkey, reports of both international bodies as well as of the media became sporadic and overshadowed by other developments that took the stage in Turkey. Özdemir & Eraydın consider that the neoliberal state seems to be “hostile towards any kind of social mobilisation and solidarity that will hinder the capital accumulation”, a fact which leads to “even more fragmented urban movements without a collective mobilisation of power” (2012:20).

In the widely publicised case of the Sulukule Roma neighbourhood demolition in Istanbul, many academics, artists, activists and ordinary citizens mobilized to protest against the project<sup>189</sup>. The newspapers as well as news channels extensively covered the matter. UNESCO paid a visit to Sulukule and made statements defending the integrity of the existing historical and cultural fabric of the neighbourhood. Sulukule was considered one of the oldest Roma settlements in Istanbul, known since the times of the Ottoman Empire for its entertainment business. In the framework of the Law 5366 regarding the Preservation by

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<sup>189</sup> In 2006, Sulukule Roma Rights protection and Development Association was established, alongside the Sulukule Platform, entities which were used by different Turkish and foreign activists to make publicity for the case.

Renovation and Utilization by Revitalizing of Deteriorated Immovable Historical and Cultural Properties, a decision has been taken in June 2005, further published in the Official Gazete on July, 5<sup>th</sup> 2005, declaring Sulukule (most specifically Neslişah and Hatice Sultan neighbourhoods) as Urban Transformation and Renewal Area. Fatih Municipality (covering administratively Sulukule area) and TOKI were responsible for the implementation of the project and therefore started to negotiate the relocation of the approximately 700 house owners<sup>190</sup>, which generally could not afford the costs of the prospectively renewed homes nor were willing to move elsewhere in the city<sup>191</sup>. Through a Committee of Ministers decision, in 2006, Sulukule was declared also “Urgent Expropriation Area”, fact which prompted questions about the faith of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, more than 50% of which were tenants. In 2008, Istanbul Chamber of Architects, the Chamber of Urban Planners and Roma Culture Development and Solidarity Association filed a court case for annulment of the decision regarding the implementation of this urban renewal project. However, despite the court case, objections and criticism, hundreds of houses started to be demolished in 2009 and replaced with modern buildings. After demolishing Sulukule Roma houses, displacing its inhabitants and building instead 620 villas sold at high price to different owners, the 4<sup>th</sup> Administrative Court of Istanbul decided that the entire project was not appropriate and not in the “public interest”, therefore officially cancelled it (Milliyet 2012). In practical terms, this decision had no effect; the situation did not change after the civic mobilization and even after the court case against the decision of the municipality. Nevertheless, it is argued that movements like these happen mostly for areas with cultural diversity, historical buildings or places with a certain amount of fame. Özdemir & Eraydın argued that this happens because such events steer collective interests of the “elites” against the loss of quality of space that has to do with cultural and historical values rather than the rights of the displaced (2012:15). Sulukule was such a case. Otherwise, other urban regeneration projects in Istanbul, which involved demolitions and evictions, did not manage to get the same civic mobilization and fame as Sulukule.

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<sup>190</sup> In 2007, Fatih Municipality assessed the houses in Sulukule at a value between 50.000 and 80.000 TL. Some owners sold their houses to the company in charge of the renewal, before the urban transformation project began, earning up to 150.000 TL (approx.70.000 Euro at the time), while the reconstructed houses sold later on at around 400.000 TL (Radikal 2011).

<sup>191</sup> The main relocation area indicated for homeowners was Taşoluk, in apartment blocks provided in exchange for the houses in Sulukule, at 35km away from Istanbul city centre. Tenants were offered other options in Kayabaşı, at 60 km from Istanbul.

One other case stands out due to its tragic turnout is the case of Yuksel Dum who was supported by some activists to sue the authorities for unlawful demolition of his family house in September 2006. The house was destroyed anyway. The demolition involved police in riot gear using force, regardless of the fact that the family could prove that they had property documents for the place. Yuksel Dum was a Roma local community leader and at the time lived with his 17-member family in his father's house after his own house was demolished early on, in July 2006, alongside other 256 houses of the same neighbourhood in Küçükbakkalköy. After his father's house was demolished, he refused to leave and he continued to stay with his family on the plot of land where the house used to stand. He improvised a barrack sheltering his family and earned his living by selling flowers in an improvised shop he built on the same plot. In 2010, a decision was taken regarding the acquisition of the land in question and, because Yuksel Dum could not comply with the requirement to get the full property documents on the land by paying almost 1000 Euro / square meter, the municipality sold the land to another person. Following an appeal, the Court decided in Yuksel Dum's favour on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014. This implied that he could sell at a quite high price, since the plot of land had increased in value in the meanwhile. Sadly, in October 2014, Yuksel Dum passed away and never managed to see and experience another life for himself, leaving the rest of the family to deal with the finalization of his court settlement.

#### *5.2.2.4. Enforced Vulnerability of Women in Spaces of Exclusion*

Living in improper settlements (informal settlements, squatter, shack-dwellings etc.) and low quality housing puts "an emotional burden" on everyone but mostly on women and children. Urban inequalities can be well illustrated through the gender lens, since women make a crucial contribution to the prosperity of society through their labour. Women are at a continuous disadvantage in terms of access to resources of self-development, proper quality of living and "representation in formal institutions and urban governance" (Chant 2011). Moreover, women tend to be the ones blamed for not being able to maintain certain standards of sanitation (Obrist 2004) for their households and family members. The poorest of them also face daily humiliation and deprivation of not having the appropriate environment for catering to their basic needs, including hygiene. A 30 years old woman who lives with her

family in an improvised shelter in Küçükbakkalköy described her living space (in 2014) as follows:

It is very difficult here in the winter. We cannot warm up. There is no water here. The pillow stinks; the quilt stinks. I cannot wash them. We sometimes ask for water from the construction site [across the street] or we bring water in plastic cans from Alemdar. I took the carpet and washed it there.

The women belonging to the poorest households of *gecekondu* settlements, and especially those who have been displaced with their families due to urban regeneration, live in conditions that heavily affect their physical and mental health. Particularly those living in informal and sub-standard settlements (in old, run down buildings or in shacks and tents) are at greatest risk of being victims of violence (Chant 2011; CPRC 2010). In such settlements, the general gender-based violence determined by “unequal gender relations and cultural notions of femininity” (Hindin & Adair 2002) can be encountered. Women face degradation being obliged to use inadequate basic infrastructure and unsafe dwellings, where proper toilets or hygiene facilities have to be improvised. Using them implies exposure and lack of intimacy, but at times also harassment or abuse. Similar situations occur also when women take up informal – occasional work or illegal activities for income generation purposes. The women and girls in these settlements go to work (collecting items from garbage etc.) together with the males in their families or their siblings, however sometimes they have to cater for themselves all alone. Some cases involving acts of violence perpetrated against women have been reported. Women are accused of stealing and are harassed and molested in various ways by security guards or by police. Women report physical and verbal abuse for trespassing and stealing. However, there are also cases of rape that have been discovered by NGOs but which have not been officially reported to the police by the victims. This is because some were afraid to be themselves arrested due to the fact that they were committing a crime (stealing from a private or public property) when the rape happened.<sup>192</sup>

Begging is a form of income generation taken up mainly by women and children, which also fosters a great amount of trauma and perpetual humiliation. A

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<sup>192</sup> Case documented together with ZDA about women living in the settlements in Nişantepe and in the tents on the margins of the road in nearby Küçükbakkalköy etc. This is the particular case of a woman who had a baby as a result of rape, allegedly by construction workers, after she has been caught stealing iron bars from a construction site. There are other cases of women being sexually harassed by individuals catching them collecting scrap from dumping sites and by policemen who request sexual favours in exchange for freedom and no prosecution.

woman living in a tent with her family after the demolitions in Küçükbakkalköy goes to collect vegetables from the garbage bins of the stores and open markets in Ataşehir, together with her children, to be able to cook for the family<sup>193</sup>. While she searches through dumpsters, the children go inside stores and ask for bread. Another woman, over 60, frail and barely walking, living also in the same group of tents and improvised shelter, goes to collect paper to be able to earn some money and buy food: “we run after a bowl of soup” [Tr. *tencere çorba peşindeyiz*]. Every day is an insecure struggle for subsistence and this type of daily humiliation transforms itself in resentment against the “others” – the better-off of the society which excludes them.

Moreover, the prejudice against women in general in Turkey and against Roma women in particular threatens also their prospects to become tenants as well as owners of property. A divorced Roma woman in Küçükbakkalköy who struggled after losing her home due to urban regeneration, emphasized the fact that she had to take her former husband back in, just to show that she had a “male guardian” in order to be able to rent an apartment. She maintains this situation although she is the one earning the living of the entire household, because it is easier also to engage with the neighbours and other people she comes in contact with, if she is not seen as being a single woman.

### 5.3. Conclusion

Housing is a social determinant for many fields of development. It is altogether a basic need, an incentive as well as an obstacle for human development when not provided in adequate form and terms. Housing is considered under the international and EU institutions’ provisions for poverty reduction. For a sustainable livelihood outcome, positive measures regarding housing provisions are important. However, comprehensive integrated measures, taking into account specificities and capabilities of the beneficiaries are also needed. One important issue that the Roma face nowadays in Turkey, as elsewhere in Europe, is the lack of adequate housing. Affected by long-term poverty and pushed to migration, many Roma live in slums at home and abroad, facing evictions and perpetual vulnerability of their livelihoods.

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<sup>193</sup> Field Notes, Küçükbakkalköy / Ataşehir / Istanbul, 2014

The slums in Turkey – *gecekondu* – tolerated and regulated up to a certain level by the state, have been “safety” spaces for the urban poor. Although characterized by poverty, living in the *gecekondu* has been an important social security mechanism for people who have been allowed to have stable residence and start building their future. The growth of *gecekondu*, however, led to its exploitation; politicians found a fertile ground in the inhabitants of the *gecekondu*, gaining their votes through tolerance of controversial policies and practices in these areas. Looking for short-term gain, politicians and authorities disregarded potential risks that could arise from unsafe construction and unregulated development (e.g.: building without taking into account basic engineering standards that would protect the structures against earthquakes and other hazards etc.). Moreover, having in mind that the population settled in *gecekondu* neighbourhoods is generally poor, welfare provision gestures have been continuously used by politicians in exchange for votes and political support.

Since no social housing concept exists in Turkey, *gecekondu* has been the only alternative for the poor to find accommodation in the major cities, until 1984 when the Turkish Mass Housing agency – TOKI was mandated to provide housing for the poor and for low-income citizens. Concomitantly, TOKI has the authority to deal with the slums / *gecekondu*, hence clearing them off and replacing them with new schemes of apartment blocks. TOKI has gained tremendous powers after 2002, alongside municipalities as their enablers at local level, making out of urban renewal and the construction sector the most lucrative businesses of the AKP rule.

Although the provision of housing has been the main policy for the Roma in Turkey since the Governmental Roma Opening of 2010, housing has been also the most affected aspect of Roma people’s lives ever since. The urban renewal / regeneration that gained speed under the AKP rule affected the poorest in the urban areas, hence most of the Roma living in the oldest neighbourhoods of the cities of Turkey. Alternatives for housing, when provided to the displaced Roma, are usually not suitable to the customs and the venues for income generation that the Roma can access. Once moved away from their former spaces of survival – mainly the old *gecekondu* neighbourhoods, the Roma find hardly any coping mechanisms and often have to circle back to new slums where they can find more security than in the new, modern apartment blocks built by the Government and given to them under condition of monthly payments. The “200 Houses” scheme in Samsun, implemented in 2008

by Samsun municipality and TOKI, has been seen for a long time as one of the best practices of accommodating the Roma who previously inhabited a *gecekond* settlement. Investigation into the way this “model” project has influenced the lives of the Roma families shows however that the provision of housing alone did not eliminate their poverty or exclusion and that more in depth intervention is necessary.

The shock of the loss of shelter, the violence of the displacement and the indignity of the “alternatives” affect people’s capacity to search for redress and balance their livelihoods. When the Roma are displaced from their former neighbourhoods, although poor and with limited prospects, they lose the sense of community and safety. They become more vulnerable and carry the trauma of the loss of their homes, referring to it like to the loss “of a creature” or as becoming “orphans” as a result of its loss; their homes and their community is depicted as a family that they have lost together with the demolitions and their estrangement. Urban regeneration / gentrification has been re-designing the relationship between space and power, redefining identities and the dynamic of the cities. Those forced to leave lose part of their social self and the safety provided by their community, new vulnerabilities being born for them. Therefore, the neoliberal policies of the AKP Government brought about new forms of social stratification and dynamics, new challenges calling for new coping mechanisms that some of the most vulnerable groups, as the Roma, are yet to find and employ in order to “survive”.

In the context of urban transformation, the poorest, the evicted and those struggling to find mechanisms of survival as a result, are systemically excluded and invisibilized, becoming collateral victims of the economic development. While new resources of wealth are created for those who can afford them, the poor are further disempowered. The poor Roma do not get to benefit from any policy or investment that would help them strategize for their livelihoods, while transitioning from being tolerated in the *gecekond* to being thrown into insecurity and sometimes homelessness or, in the fortunate cases, to housing alternatives that do not fit the coping capacities of the household. In this view, the institutions and authorities mandated to serve the citizen are participating in the victimization of the poor Roma and the perpetuation of their unequal relations with the rest of the society.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

In this dissertation I examined the state of poverty and social exclusion of the Roma in Turkey, by looking at the extent in which the state policies have influenced their situation, in the context of Turkey's specific approach towards ethnicities, the European Union conditionalities and the neo-liberal policies enforced after 2002 by the AKP governments. The thesis takes into account the benchmarks related to the process of awareness and policy making on the Roma issues in Turkey that rendered them visible in the public sphere and which are the 2002 change of Government when AKP came into power, the 2005 start of EU negotiations and the 2010 Roma Opening.

The long-lasting lack of attention to the Roma in-group specificities and vulnerability by state power structures has induced a form of two-fold invisibility: propagated by the state and utilized by the Roma as a mechanism of survival. Moreover, the Roma in Turkey have used this invisibility to further attempt "to resemble the others" and to assimilate, such self-invisibilization in itself being a mechanism of survival. Others have formally blended in, while privately conserving their ethnic specificities, finding niches of survival and development away from their ethnic patterns. Officially having the Roma (and other groups considered by policies under this umbrella-term) as belonging to the majority Muslim population in Turkey involves a certain degree of "inclusiveness". However, this categorization disempowers and "silences" different ethnic and religious groups inside it, rendering them invisible.

Since 2010, the Roma-targeted policies have situated the Roma in a type of yoyo ride between visibility and invisibility, between objects of social justice at discourse level and excluded subjects of charity in practice. These policies have made the Roma aware of themselves as a distinct group, more visible to the rest of the society and to the different power structures, therefore rendering their exclusion more visible. These policies had a dichotomic effect on their status. The Roma were visible in the past through their precarious presence in the poor and centrally located urban *gecekondu* neighbourhoods, however they were invisible in state policies and their needs for targeted support were ignored. Once AKP recognized officially the need for addressing their situation in 2010, the Roma started to become visible in policies as well. However, due to urban regeneration that gained speed after AKP



came into rule, the Roma are being forced out from urban centres, in an attempt to be dragged back into a form of invisibilization, where their poverty would be hidden from the “eyes” of the society.

Although poor and disempowered, the Roma are not the most at risk population group in Turkey. However, they have been “picked” by the Government to be addressed through targeted strategies and have been “offered” grand gestures of public recognition, raising further unfulfilled hopes. In this regard, I argue that the Turkish government took up the “Roma issue” as one apparently facile topic to attempt to demonstrate its commitment to the EU on topics related to human and social rights of vulnerable populations. This is demonstrated by the pace of policies and projects launched after the Roma Opening, which have numerous shortcomings; they employ less of a rights-based approach and have more of a temporary welfare orientation. Also, the lack of real capacity of the Roma communities and its civil society to demand rights has greatly influenced the pace of state policies towards them. The high number of civil society organizations of the Roma in Turkey is misleading. These organisations do not reflect the capacity and the mobilization strength of the Roma but are to a great extent the artificial result of a rushed process of “ticking the boxes” urged by the EU as well as an alternative form of linking different community gatekeepers with the power-holders in the Government.

While the measures related to the Roma Opening were welcomed by the Roma and by the EU institutions, the impact on their situation on the ground has been so far very limited. Moreover, the incoming EU funding has also led to this “artificial awakening” of the Roma civil society. It has raised hopes and stimulated ambitions of Roma gatekeepers who have been using the existing avenues of participation not necessarily as an empowerment tool for collective negotiation with the power-holders, but for immediate individual financial or political gain. Additionally, the majority of the Roma NGOs are used by Turkey’s main political parties, many of them being established and supported by municipalities or governorates at local level. In this context, the Roma communities use this relationship of voluntary subordination to the power structures and the dominant class also as survival mechanism as well as a livelihood strategy. Mixing the general lack of power as well as lack of experience in civil society work with some aspirations of “recognition” and political gain, many Roma NGOs in Turkey are becoming accomplices in their own communities’ marginalization while attempting

to overzealously side with those in power. The gatekeepers' livelihoods strategies and plans for sustainability are, in practice, the vulnerability-inducing instruments for the communities they claim to represent. Different community leaders and NGO presidents render the Roma into a "helpless" disempowered mass prone to exploitation.

The Government and its supporting power-holders at local level (mainly local administration and ruling political party organisations) have been using welfare in exchange for political support, in the context in which the Roma persist in having low levels of education and health, and extremely limited access to sustainable employment. The way in which the government uses the provision of welfare especially in the case of the Roma does not reflect a rights-based approach, but it creates a relation of gift exchange that mainly consolidates the AKP's political credibility. Besides being maintained indebted and dependent, the community's behaviour transforms to fit the requirements or aspirations of the giver. The same way in which, at a more macro level, the nature of available funding orients the interventions and the structuring of the civil society (which tends to craft projects that fit the objectives and the guidelines of the donors and not necessarily the real needs of the communities), at a micro level, these gestures of giving disguised sometimes under the practices of state welfare, influence the way people behave and interact.

While looking at how the state policies have propagated a process of exclusion towards the Roma, before and after the 2010 Roma Opening, the study brings empirical evidence from the field to respond to the research sub-questions and illustrates the impact of these policies on Roma vulnerability and, consequently, the coping mechanisms and livelihoods strategies that the Roma have employed as a response. The research that builds this dissertation covered the situation of the Roma and the related political developments in Turkey before the crises that started to estrange Turkey from the European Union integration prospects. Moreover, the thesis investigated more in depth the particular influence of the housing policies, on the poverty and social exclusion of the Roma in Turkey, as inquired in the last sub-question of the research. While looking at housing policies and provisions, the study reviewed the situation of the Roma also from the perspective of sustainability of their livelihoods strategies. In this regard, the framework conceptualized by Chambers & Conway (1991) was applied by taking into account the transforming structures and

processes that have an influence on livelihoods assets. It was further shown how people's vulnerability is determined by uneven access to livelihood resources and inability to cope with shocks that are determined by the human, economic, political or physical environment. The condition of Roma reached by this research illustrates lack of adequate assets, weak capabilities and an inter-generational transfer of vulnerability, as explained also in section 1.2. Shocks related to loss of shelter (evictions, displacement, relocation), like in the case of the poor Roma households affected by the urban regeneration projects in the major cities of Turkey, have long-term impact on their livelihoods assets, strategies and outcomes.

Alternatives for housing, when provided to the displaced Roma, are usually not suitable to the customs and the venues for income generation that the Roma undertake. Once moved away from their former spaces of survival – mainly the old *gecekondu* neighbourhoods, the Roma hardly find viable coping mechanisms and often have to circle back to old or new slums where they can find more security than in the new, modern apartment blocks built by the Government. In this sense, both the *gecekondu* and the new apartment blocks schemes are spaces of exclusion for the poor Roma where they have to struggle continuously to sustain their livelihoods. The example of “200 Houses” scheme in Samsun, implemented in 2008 by Samsun municipality and TOKI, has been seen for a long time as one of the best practices of accommodating the Roma who previously inhabited a *gecekondu* settlement. Investigation into the way in which this “model” housing project has influenced the lives of the Roma families shows however that the provision of housing did not eliminate their poverty or exclusion and that more in depth intervention would have been necessary.

Roma living in poor settlements and especially those affected by the urban regeneration policies of the state are particularly vulnerable. The capabilities of poor Roma to access adequate resources have a direct effect on their vulnerability, which in itself is influenced by structural factors. While this situation persists, housing provision policies that do not come accompanied by income generation opportunities or access to resources turn out to have limited positive impact on their livelihoods sustainability. Although the old *gecekondu* neighbourhoods the Roma used to live in before displacement were poor and vulnerable, the low level of maintenance of households in that environment and their own invisibility offered them more viable coping mechanisms and survival strategies. However, as argued in section 1.2.2.,

while spaces of marginality (e.g. *gecekondu* in this case) can allow people to develop survival mechanisms, it cannot be expected that the poorest would be able to escape poverty without any intervention from outside.

The Roma have gained some livelihoods alternatives from exploiting their own invisibility in the past, however these alternatives have been too weak to be sustainable, in the context in which Roma livelihoods are continuously vulnerable due to shocks, trends and changes in politics and policies in Turkey. The persistence of poverty, despite diversification of welfare support, proves that poverty has “endurance” and is inherited over generations. Moreover, increasingly during the AKP rule, the Roma households have been displaced due to the urban transformation projects of the state and have been left without the necessary assets and tools to address their own vulnerability. Relocating the people from these settlements did not always overcome the exclusion they faced before; their vulnerability has been invisibilized by being hidden from sight, away from the centres of the big cities. The shock of the loss of shelter, the violence of the displacement and the lack of dignifying alternatives affects people’s capacity to search for redress and balance their livelihoods. Moreover, when the Roma are displaced from their former neighbourhoods, although poor and with limited prospects, they lose the sense of community and safety. They become more vulnerable and carry the trauma of the loss of their homes. Those forced to leave due to evictions lose part of their social self and the safety provided by their community, new vulnerabilities being born. In this regard, the neoliberal policies of the AKP Government brought about new forms of social stratification and dynamics, new challenges calling for new coping mechanisms that some of the most vulnerable groups, as the Roma, are yet to find and employ in order to “survive”.

This dissertation suggests that the living environment, the political context and the lack of opportunities of the poor Roma are important factors explaining the inter-generational continuity of poverty in their case. Therefore the focus of policies, which target the situation improvement of the poor, including the poor Roma, should be the creation of enforcing mechanisms for the existing welfare and inclusion policies, the development of capabilities of individuals and families to access different forms of capital, and more inclusive measures that reduce the vulnerability of households. Reducing urban poverty and working towards sustainability of livelihoods require both a strong and accountable state as well as a strong civil

society, all including groups that are less powerful and less organized. As argued by Walker & Walker (2011), social justice needs to be embedded in institutions in order to achieve equality of opportunities and ultimately tackle poverty.

As argued in section 1.2. of this dissertation, the entrapment of the Roma in a cycle of poverty is often emphasized as the reason for their exclusion. By neglecting their existence in a marginal area of the society and, in this way, invisibilizing them, pushing them to exploit unregulated and often grey niches of survival, states are obstructing the chance of these groups to find sustainable redress. The Roma lose, in this manner, the opportunity to exercise active citizenship, to contribute to the society and to gain that “respectability” for which they have been striving for centuries. Alternatively, getting out of poverty and distancing themselves from the stigmatized spaces of exclusion where their extended families (used to) live, still do not exempt the Roma from being discriminated and excluded. The stigmatized label of ethnicity or of the excluded place of origins follows most of the time those that attempt to escape it, regardless of their economic and social achievements in time. At the core of their marginalization stands society’s perennial prejudice against the Roma and the lack of effective inclusive policies and practices of the states. By propagating the social exclusion of the Roma, states are unaccountably wasting resources and missing the opportunity of having the Roma contributing to the social and economic advancement of the society.

### ***Further Research***

The field incursion and the targeted respondents of the present research were addressed based on their presence on the ground of the old neighbourhoods, in the new locations where displaced families settled after demolitions and in the places where they were relocated by being offered alternative housing. The research did not follow the families that might have split and scattered on “individual” basis after demolitions. However, in a few occasions, sporadic accounts came up about families that “made it out” of the Roma neighbourhoods and the *gecekond*. These were individuals or families that allegedly managed to secure a living outside the spaces confined by poverty and exclusion or those who were said to have left to live among the “gadje” [the non-Roma]. These became however the new invisible. It was unclear if somehow they cut ties with the old neighbours or if the distancing from the old community meant integration, inclusion or assimilation for them.

Having in mind that Tilly argues that “exits from poverty” have to do with “eliminating or bypassing the usual effects of social exclusion” (2007:48), further research on what happened with the families who “separated” from the former community and who are said to have “made it” out might be of interest. In this context, the questions to be asked could cover the following details:

- What made their transition to assumingly better neighbourhoods possible?
- Where did they go? Did they join other Roma communities / settlements in the city or outside or did they settled “individually” among the non-Roma?
- How did they manage to make a living and survive? Was it the different types of capital that they might have previously accumulated (education, skills, income / jobs, extended family / networks etc.)?
- Did any of these families return to join the “Roma community”? (How long did they cope in the new environments?)
- While there is the perception that some “made it out” of poverty, what is in fact the reality? Are these “better off” people less excluded?

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